

BEADLE'S Dime New York Library

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Vol. I.

Published Every
Two Weeks.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$2.50 a Year.

No. 5

The Fire-Fiends; or, Hercules, the Hunchback.

BY A. P. MORRIS.



THE HUNCHBACK GRASPED HER DISAPPEARING FORM, TRIPPING HIMSELF, AND TOGETHER THEY FELL OUTWARD.

The Fire-Fiends;

OR,
Hercules, the Hunchback.

BY A. P. MORRIS.

CHAPTER I.

KNIFE AND FLESH.

LAVED by the waters of a mighty lake, whose vast bosom smiled back the gleeful sunshine with a sheen of splendor; kissed by prairie breezes laden with unearthly essence; prosperous and beautiful; a proud city bidding fair to outvie the metropolis of the Pacific, and dim the glories of the Atlantic wonder—Chicago reared its evidences of amazing progress before the world.

In the vicinity of Union Park stands a dwelling of imposing build—an edifice combining comfort with display. To the parlors of this residence we invite the reader.

Seated near a veranda, seeking escape from the oppressive atmosphere, was a woman of captivating beauty—a brunette, whose dark, flashing eyes were like, in their glance, to the brilliancy of twin jewels, and whose form, alone, rivaled the loveliness of her features.

Pacing the room, his face frowning, hands alternately doubling and opening, and whole manner that of poorly-curbed impatience, a young man kept her company.

She, too, betrayed signs of uneasiness. Anon she would glance at him from under eyebrows delicate, yet rich as velvet; her foot patted the yielding carpet; the perfumed fan switched jerkily in her nervous hand.

"Sister!" he said, pausing before her abruptly.

"Well, brother?"

"The hour is near—"

"Sh!" she interrupted, quickly. "Be careful of your speech."

"Pah! Who to overhear us? The last servant left the house this afternoon."

"Are you certain of that?" gazing suspiciously around.

"Yes, certain."

"I say the hour is near—"

"The hour!" she interrupted again. "Say the minute. See," (drawing a watch from her belt, and pointing to its dial, while she fixed a piercing gaze upon him,) "it lacks but five minutes to six."

"In five minutes, then," he added, thoughtfully, "we are twice enriched."

"And the pledge of the bullet-scar is kept."

He slowly raised his right hand before his eyes, and looked steadfastly at the palm. In the very center was a livid scar, round and plain.

"Yes," he uttered, in measured tones, "the pledge of the bullet-scar is kept."

A momentary shudder passed over his frame as he turned from the beautiful being he called "sister," and a strange look settled on his handsome features.

She had marked that scarce-perceptible shiver; a smile, full of sneering sarcasm, curved her crimson lips.

"You hesitate. You regret what we are doing."

"Hesitate!"—stopping short, midway across the room; then, dashing his hands to his brow, he cried, huskily: "No—I do not hesitate; but, would to heaven the thing were done with! It is torturing me."

"A foolish weakness."

"Call it what you will. Sister"—he contemplated her in an indefinable way—"are you nerved to fulfill your promise to the Hunchback, when he shall tell us that Mortimer Gascon is—"

She stayed completion of the sentence by a wave of her fan.

"My duties are my own, Evard; attend to your debts as I shall to mine."

Another silence filled the room. A deep crisis was pending in that house; the words, the actions of each betrayed suspense.

Presently a footstep echoed in the hall. The massive door swung open, and a being, half human, half indescribable, stood in their presence.

The woman sprung from her seat. Her companion caught his breath, leaned forward, with hands half raised, and pallid face.

He who entered thus unceremoniously, was a mulatto of dwarfish stature, with crooked back, broad shoulders, fierce visage, and eyes of piercing glance. His arms were noticeably long; his feet longer in proportion; his ears grew prominently outward; his attire was of a careless kind—and one sleeve rolled up, discovered a wrist like a bar of iron, with muscles of steel and stain of night.

Across his left temple, partially hidden by a matted growth of wiry black hair, was a broad scar, as if from the cut of a knife-blade. When he spoke his voice growled and hissed simultaneously; and while he contemplated the brother and sister, his large lips parted with utterance of the brief words:

"'Tis done!"

"Done, Hercules!" cried the young man, striding forward and grasping that bare, hard wrist. "Are you sure? He is dead, then?"

"I say 'tis done!" growled the Hunchback, wrenching himself free, and scowling darkly.

"When I say that, I mean he is dead. Why ask me if I am sure? Have I ever lied to you?"

"And the body?" interrogated the woman.

"Is being attended to now. I brought one with me who knows how to help, with his tongue in chains."

"But is it not too early? Suspicion may be—"

"Peace. Am I a fool? What I do, I do well. I tell you Mortimer Gascon is dead. His body is being borne away this minute."

"Where to?" asked the young man.

"You talk too much. But I will answer; mayhap to a dissecting room—"

"Then we are undone!"

"Peace!" and there was an impatient accent in his tone. "There is no poison in him. He died naturally enough. When I told you the moment he would die, I did but guess. He left the world full half an hour ago—it was for want of care."

Then sharply: "My money, now, Evard Greville. You are rich, since Mortimer Gascon is no more, so you may handily give me beyond the sum agreed upon."

"I can not pay you now; I—"

began Greville.

"Can not? Why? Come—beware of trifling!"

"I have no money by me. I must obtain it from a friend," hastily continued the other, as he caught the menace of the mulatto's words.

"If you will meet me at the Washington street tunnel, two hours hence, you shall have your due."

"Enough. See that I am not disappointed, Evard Greville," and he concluded, threateningly: "Do not think I fear for myself, in what has been done. If you trifle, I will let out the secret!"

"You need not threaten, Hercules. I will be prompt."

"I will be there. Now, Hermoine Greville, fulfill your promise."

She shrunk from him. All color receded from her face as this fierce being recalled a dreaded subject to her mind.

The eyes of the Hunchback bent keenly upon her.

"Hercules," she faltered, "desist from your fearful claim. Hear me: we are very rich, now—half of my share shall be yours, if you will forego—"

"This is a useless prayer. Peace. Let me have none of it. Your pledge, I say. Be quick!"

She retreated as he advanced a step.

"No—no—I can not grant it!"

"Ha! remember! The alternative is worse!"

"God help me!—it is!"

"Quick, then!"

To this demand it was evident that Hermoine had hoped to make such tempting offers in the balance, as would induce the dwarf to release her from her promise.

But she had made a mistake. Hercules was determined.

Her whole form quivered in a nameless terror as she advanced to a table, whereon lay a small, sharp knife, and a plaster, apparently prepared for his use.

Raising the glistening steel in her hand, she let it fall again, and staggered back. "My God! I can not do it!" she cried. "Oh, spare me this sacrifice!"

"No! It is my price for which I have labored. Have it I will—or—"

His bony fingers took up the knife, and while he grew fairly hideous in mien, he drew near to the beautiful Hermoine.

Evard, pale and immobile, watched the scene.

"Courage, sister! We have won the game—we must pay our ally his price for assisting. It will soon be over and no great harm can come from it," spoke Greville, though the utterance was choking, and his eyes were fairly starting.

"Prepare!" said the Hunchback, in a voice of unmistakable ferocity.

"Monster! My beauty will be gone forever! Will nothing else appease you?"

"Nothing. Prepare, I say, Hermoine Greville, or it will be the worse for you."

He touched his thumb to the razored blade; then clutched the pearl handle firmly.

"See, it is nothing; a mere scratch, after all. I did not mind it much, when it was done to me!" and he pointed to the scar on his own temple.

For a second she stared wildly at him; then with a low moan, she sunk down.

Evard made a movement to assist her.

"Stand back!" ordered Hercules. "It is better thus. She will not feel the pain. Hand me the plaster from the table."

He turned to obey. When he again faced the dwarf—though only a brief moment later—a dread act had been perpetrated.

Hermoine Greville was marked by an ugly, bleeding gash across the left temple, from which a piece of the fair skin had been severed.

"See," he said, when he arose from his task, "it is all over. Better this, than for her to be

come the wife of Hercules, the Hunchback! Ha! ha! ha! is it not so? Now, I am off. Remember, Evard Greville, the Washington street tunnel, two hours hence. Fail me, at your peril!"

He shook a dark forefinger toward the one who knelt beside Hermoine, and then disappeared beyond the doorway.

When Hermoine Greville revived, it was as if even her insensibility had not shut out realization of what had transpired.

Quickly, one hand sought her wounded brow. There was a chill recoil of her every nerve, and a groan of agony escaped her.

"Listen! Listen! Do not swoon again!"

"Hercules—where is he?" she breathed with difficulty.

"Gone."

The answer strengthened her. Gradually she regained her feet, with his aid, tottering dizzily in his support.

It was a fate which gave her position directly before one of the long, gilded mirrors, and, in a second, she caught sight of herself. A loud shriek rung through the room, and Evard held a dead weight in his arms.

The picture which met her gaze was too much to bear; a face she was once so proud of, now, and forever, was robbed of its smooth loveliness—so disfigured that time nor art could heal over the dreadful mark.

Feverish with excitement, the young man dragged her away.

"Hermoine! Hermoine!" he called. "Rouse!—rouse yourself! My God! the wretch has killed her!"

Swaying under the weight of his burden, he ascended the stairs. In vain he strove to restore her by words and importunities, till he grew wild with desperation.

At the first landing was a table, with pitcher and goblet on it. Frantically he grasped up the first—then dashed it from him with a groan of despair. It was empty.

"She will die! O-h, for some assistance here! Hermoine!—will you never rouse?—ha!—what—who are you?"

As he turned from the stand, to continue up the stairs, he was confronted by a shadowy something, a form dimly outlined in the rays of a street-lamp entering like a ghostly halo at the window.

It was a human, yet it moved not. Though he challenged, it spoke not.

Something was tearing at his heart—fear! for the apparition, so sudden, so silent, coming when his conscience was fresh in wicked hardening, struck dread to the center of his soul.

"Who are you?" he cried again, and his voice echoed dimly through the house.

But only those echoes answered him. No sound, save the tumultuous beating of his heart, broke the grave-like stillness.

CHAPTER II.

THE MASKED QUEEN.

THE Hunchback hurried along the broad hall, and out at the front door. As he descended the steps to the pavement, he was busily resolving something in his mind.

"Now, what," thought he, "can persuade Evard Greville, so far from home, to pay the money he owes me? The tunnel—it is a long walk from here. And, now I think on it, it lies directly in my route, or very near, which is the same. Something else than this business with me takes him there. It will do no harm to watch him when we separate; and watch him I will. So that is settled. Ho, there! Trix!"

"Here," answered a voice to his call.

A close cab was standing near the curb, a few pavements distant. He advanced to the vehicle, and peered inside.

"Is that you, Hercules?" came lowly from the depth of the cushions.

"Yes, it is I. How are you feeling, Mortimer Gascon?"

"Weak—very weak. I had grown tired waiting for you. What detained you?"

"Peace. Too much talk will make you weaker. Trix!"

"Ay," came responsively from the driver's box.

"Off, now, to our home in Polk street," and, with the order, he stepped in and closed the door.

"I waited to secure the price agreed upon—my reward for killing you," said the dwarf, sinking back opposite the form which occupied the rear seat. "How now—are you quite dead yet?"

"Far from it, thank Heaven!"

"Peace, then. Rest your tongue, and your mind will strengthen."

The whip of the driver was cracking; the cab rumbled swiftly away.

Neither spoke again as they sped on and on past the numerous blocks that lay between them and their destination.

Hercules seemed absorbed in meditation—that meditation, a resumption of his conjectures as to what could draw Evard Greville to such a distance from his residence, when a place nearer might as well have suited. And, as before, he concluded with a mental resolution to follow the young man, after they separated.

When the cab halted, he called Trix, who descended from the box and flung open the door.

"A hand here," said the Hunchback.

They gently lifted the form that had accompanied them, and bore it out.

Into a weird-fronted dwelling of three stories, whose door opened, as if by magic, at their approach; and then up a narrow stairway dimly lighted by a lamp with red-tinted shade, which swung from the ceiling of the passage above.

The door closed after them, and a female followed in their rear.

Entering a long room on the second floor, they deposited their burden on a luxurious couch, and Hercules said:

"Here is your resting-place. How now, Mortimer Gascon—has the ride disturbed you?"

"I am weak—very weak," answered Mortimer.

"Peace, then, and rest. You are out of danger, both of enemies and sickness. A month will make you right again."

"Is this Mortimer Gascon?" asked the woman who had followed them.

"Yes, it is he—the last of the doomed. A miracle saved him. But that I was the instrument used, the pledge of the bullet-scar would have been kept!"

The apartment was a bed-chamber, but there was that in its furnishings of red, which gave it a fantastic surrounding; while long, crimson candles, in polished holders, shed a wavering halo round those assembled.

Upon the Hunchback the effect was striking—seeming to give his strange, half-devilish form and mien a greater prominence.

Trix was a mulatto; a boy of about seventeen years. His face was intelligent, his build symmetrical—broad shoulders, and a stern cast of countenance betokening strength of muscle and purpose. The peculiar mold of features, poise of body, and growth of hair, told of Indian in his veins; and in his dark, glittering eyes there lurked a close resemblance to the piercing glance of Hercules.

The woman—standing statue-like to one side—was a singular personage.

A jetty mask concealed her face, terminating in beaded lace that fell, folding, on a full bosom. From beneath the mask volumed rich tresses of hair, black as the stain of a raven's wing, and drooping—in gloss-like fibers of silk—nearly to her feet. Over night-hued garments, whose unique fit discovered the form of a Venus—and whose skirts trailed far behind her—was thrown a cloak of red fabric, red as the sinking sun, and scintillating with spangles—as if the wearer had bathed, first in a sea of blood, and afterward in a shower of gold. Her hands were gloved in red, and in the eyelets of the mask—which would seem to hide the features of a Peri—shone orbs of unearthly brightness.

"Then Evard Greville thinks that Mortimer Gascon is removed forever from his path?"

"He does; more, that I, Hercules, was his tool. But, save talk. Here is our charge; let us nurse him well. Trix, begone—the horses."

Trix withdrew. When he was gone, the female asked:

"And your reward, Hercules?—you received both?"

"Not both, but one. Hermoine Greville is marked for life!"

He extended the thin strip of skin from the brow of Hermoine.

With a quick movement she seized it.

"It is mine!" she exclaimed, and there was a hiss to her voice, as she uttered the words. "Carl Grand will not see so much to charm him now, in the one he calls 'beautiful Hermoine'; and this is some recompense for what she done to me!" She concluded with a low laugh, full of deep significance, yet of silvery tone.

"Zone, what if you do love this man, after all? There's jealousy in your speech."

The Hunchback regarded her steadily; the half-sneer that ever dwelt on his face, grew deeper.

"Love him!"—an exclamation sharp and breathless; "ha! ha! ha! fear not. You do not yet know your sister, Hercules; it is to our interest that I should retain the love of Carl Grand—and he *does* love me!—but as for my loving *him*—yes—for the part he is to play; no more."

"Peace. You burn to a passion quick as powder to the match—"

"Do you not see," she interrupted, impatiently, "that if he loves Hermoine Greville too well, my power over him is gone?"

"Yes, I see—"

"That power gone, then who will place the records in our hands?—the will? Who, Hercules? He, alone, knows where they are."

"Yes, yes. Enough." And he continued while he gazed down at the blood-red carpet: "When does your lover meet you again?"

"To-night."

"Eh? Why it is but a single night since—"

"And this time, the place of meeting will be here," she added, without heeding his words.

"Zone!"

"Why do you start? I am tired of going elsewhere when I appoint an interview."

"This, then, thought the Hunchback, "is why Evard Greville—" but he finished aloud

with the question: "Have you done well, Zone?"

"Why not? Evard Grev—"

She stopped short. Mortimer Gascon was staring at them, and listening with interest to their dialogue. A sign from Hercules had checked her.

"Where are you going?" asked Zone, as the dwarf moved toward the door.

"To meet a debtor."

"Evar—" but he silenced her, by placing a finger to his lips.

"When will you return?"

"Early or late, as it best suits," vanishing as he uttered the indefinite reply.

Zone turned to Mortimer Gascon.

"You must forget what you heard just now. It can do you no good to strive to recollect."

Now that we have a chance to view this Mortimer Gascon, we see that he is somewhat past fifty years—a man whose figure, though at present worn with illness, bore evidences of a naturally strong constitution. The sunken eyes, colorless cheeks, faint voice—all betrayed the severe ordeal of an unusual sickness.

He was studying his singular companion, and said, as she drew near:

"Do you wear that mask continually? Will you take it off for my curiosity?"

"No, I can not remove it. It is better for you not to see my face. Shall I bring you wine?"

She arranged a salver at his bedside, on which was a decanter of sparkling wine. Pouring out a glassful, she held it to his lips.

"I am in strange company," he uttered, slowly, while he strove in vain to pierce the woman's mask.

"You are with friends."

"I do not doubt it. Will you tell me what it was Hercules brought you?—that little thing you snatched so eagerly?"

"Alter your questioning, Mortimer Gascon, or I shall say 'no' to every thing. There—lie down again. Try to sleep. You need rest."

"You are a sister to Hercules," he continued. "Yet I can scarce think it; that mask surely hides a white face—"

"If you think I am his sister, or that I am not, forget it. You may be mistaken in either."

When she had settled the invalid comfortably, Zone began walking to and fro, her slippered feet sinking noiselessly into the rich carpeting. Her head was bowed, her gloved hands were clasped and hanging listlessly.

Mortimer Gascon watched her, as the moments passed, and ere he knew it, sleep closed his eyelids. But, even in slumber, the brain was trying to decide upon her identity; he dreamed of her, moved restlessly on his pillow.

Zone paused in her walk. She was lost to everything save the unspoken shapings of her mind.

"Do I love this man, whose line I have sworn to hate—whose father and mother before him, my father sacrificed in the cause of vengeance; whom I, as his daughter, against the sole survivor have sworn to thwart in the oath of the bullet scar, and make the instrument of my triumph over Hermoine Greville? Have I *dared* to love him? Was Hercules right in his suspicion? What is this feeling in my heart—a softness which holds me back when I most long to crush him? What is it?—love? Zone!—girl! are you crazy?"

She started and glanced uneasily about her, as if fearful that her thoughts had struck the ear of an eavesdropper.

But she was alone, save the presence of Mortimer Gascon; and a glance at the bed assured her that he was sleeping soundly.

Presently, a sound was heard, which made her start. It was a footstep. The heavy, confident tread told that it was a man.

In another moment the corner's hand was upon the knob.

With inconceivable quickness, she sprang to one side of the apartment, and touched a spring in the wall.

Instantly, a curtain, gathered in folds across the ceiling, fell downward, entirely screening that portion of the room where Mortimer Gascon lay.

"It is he. He has obeyed my instructions—entered with the key I gave him, followed to the source of the entry-light, and—"

The door opened, and Evard Greville stood before her.

CHAPTER III.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

LEAVING the house wherein lay Mortimer Gascon, Hercules started for the appointed place of meeting with Evard Greville.

A brisk walk for a few squares shortly brought him to the spot designated.

Though the hour was early, a grave-like silence reigned; the gale that was blowing seemed to moan and howl on the night. He glanced around in vain for some sign of the young man.

A straggling figure passed close by him, with face averted, and vanished in the gloom beyond with noiseless tread.

"Satan devour me!" muttered he. "I think I know that shape. Where have I seen it? No matter—I am not here to tax my brain with wondering at strangers. 'Sdeath! Evard Gre-

ville is late. What keeps him? Will he dare—No, he knows better."

He folded those great, muscular arms across his broad breast, then looked around a second time. But he saw no one.

The minutes flew by. He stood there like a thing of the gloom itself; his shaggy head gradually sunk forward, and his lips moved in a low muttering.

"Has Zone done well? Why has Evard Greville come to her house? What if he should discover me there?—learn of our relations? He would balk us. Yet she is shrewd. But for her fascination of him, we might labor till eternity—bah! let Zone be to herself. She will not trip us—ha!"

"Toll!—toll!" came the waver of a bell-note, echoing on the stilly air.

Soon another doled forth its clarion strokes. And another, as if in answer, mingled discordantly with the first two—the three heralding the outbreak of a fire.

He listened. There was something in the sound which riveted him; he glanced up at the sky, which, south of of him, was trembling in a crimson hue.

Brighter grew the rays; steadfastly he watched the luminous glare.

A rustling noise drew his attention.

The same shadowy figure which had once before passed him glided by, almost brushing his sleeve as it went.

An angry frown wrinkled his dark-skinned brow.

"What means this? Am I dogged? That shape has been spying upon me? Who is it? Devils! I'll soon find out!"

He sprang forward in pursuit. He could faintly discern the fleeing object ahead of him, and, with eyes fastened on it, he ran at his utmost speed—swift as a hound, and resolute.

Suddenly it vanished. When he reached the spot where he had last seen it, it was gone as mysteriously as if into the ground.

Muttering a curse, he continued on in the direction of his home.

"So, Evard Greville has failed me—owls rend him for it!" he growled, disappointedly. "I'll be even with him. Better that he held a viper to his throat than to trifle with Hercules, the Hunchback! Fiends! here is a fire!" the last called forth by noting an extraordinary increase in the bright reflection overhead.

Another glance showed him that the fire was spreading rapidly.

"It is coming this way!" he exclaimed, increasing his gait. "Has hell burst onto us? See!—there's the flame!—and there!—and there!"

It seemed to him that a wall of fire, reaching from earth to heaven was marching forward.

On every side arose shouts and cries. Engines were rumbling past with winged violence. He saw groups and crowds of men, women and children fleeing precipitately. Already a strange, mastering excitement had entered his breast. From a quick walk, he fell into a run.

Turning the corner at Wells street, he halted abruptly.

There, in front of him, going in the same direction as he, was a figure his keen eye could not mistake, even in the marvelous change from gloom to glare. It was a man—the one who had passed him twice at the tunnel.

Only for an instant did he pause. Then, with a renewal of his determination to discover the other's identity, he dashed forward.

"Halt! Halt, there!" he cried, threateningly.

But in the din, which now prevailed to a deafening extent, the figure did not seem to hear.

It, too, was running, and at sound of the pursuer's voice, it only sped on faster.

"Halt!" cried Hercules, again, while his strain of every nerve drew him nearer to the object of his chase each second. "Halt!—or I'll twist your limb from limb when I catch you!"

Twice, thrice, he nearly lost sight of the man, for the street was packing with humans—vehicles thundered by, loaded with household goods, and terrified families.

When nearly in front of his house, he was but a few leaps in the rear.

"Halt, I say!—I have you! I would know who you are that dogs my steps—ha! Satan!"

The pursued party wheeled suddenly. The flash of steel, for a second, blinded Hercules, and, in the same instant, a stout arm dealt him a blow with a weaponed fist.

He staggered dizzily under the unexpected assault—reeled out into the street, falling.

"Look out! Look out!" yelled a hoarse voice.

A wagon, with horse snorting in terror, came dashing along. The driver held the reins with all his force of arm, and strove vainly to turn aside the maddened beast in its headlong course.

But the Hunchback heard not the warning.

"Look out, there!" rose the cry again.

Too late! The hard shafts struck the tottering man, and as he was knocked back again to the pavement, he clutched wildly at the thin air.

Blood streamed from the cuts on his face and head, half blinding him; the thick smoke clouding his breath, was strangling him.

Still, with his nature of iron, and more than human endurance, he did not fall.

The last of the fleeing crowd had disappeared. Half smothered, to his ears came the yells of men, and shrieks of women; while, on the other side, there reared the lurid sheet, which advanced in front of the gale.

He felt the heat in his face. Sparks showered around him.

Presently, above the savage roar of the flames, he heard the scream of a woman. It roused him.

Mustering his remaining energies, he started, with a drunken step, to gain the interior of the house.

At one wrench he forced the door—closing it quickly after him. And none too soon; for the greedy element, actually *pressed down by the force of the wind*, was beginning to shoot through the street like a molten river.

"Zone! Zone!" he called.

"Hercules! — here! — here!" answered the voice of Zone; and he made his way in the direction of the sound.

Up, up to the third story. Here he encountered Zone and Evard Greville. The latter was ghastly in fear.

"To the roof!" cried the hunchback. "The street's aflame! We must jump from house to house!—and mayhap it is too late for that! To the roof!"

On one side of the dwelling was a space. On the other a long row of houses, joining, offered, perhaps, an escape. Yet even here there seemed little hope.

The trap opened near the eaves.

Zone was first to step out. As she did so, a dense volume of smoke choked and blinded her. She gasped for breath, turned dizzily—tripped forward, and, uttering a loud cry, went hopelessly over into space!

But a strong arm caught her!

The Hunchback grasped her disappearing form, tripping himself, and, together, they fell outward!

As they plunged down, he gripped the eaves with his disengaged hand—the grip of a giant—and only that frail hold held them from death, twisting, swaying, dangling over a mighty oven, whose devouring tongues darted up around them in hellish glee!

The sight brought Evard Greville from his stupor. He grasped the wrist of the Hunchback—pressed those steel-wrought fingers tighter against the eaves, to make their hold the stronger.

Then, through the smoke, there appeared another on the scene. It was Trix, the Indian mulatto. He carried a heavy club, and this he raised aloft, as he sprung toward Evard Greville.

"Let go! Let them fall!" he screamed.

"Stand back!" thundered Greville.

"Let go! or I'll strike!"

A pistol leaped from the young man's breast, and while he took a hurried, excited aim, he did not neglect his retaining clasp on the wrist of Hercules.

"Help! help! help!" shrieked Zone. But what use in the appeal? Death grinned in the faces of the imperiled ones!

CHAPTER IV.

MYSTERY AND PLOTS.

WE left Evard Greville, in our first chapter, cowering before the shadowy opposition which seemed to rise, in the gloom of the stairway, like a specter, to unnerve and terrify him.

His muscles weakened, and he came near letting fall the human burden he carried. The feeling of dread, which seized him, now increased, as the ghostly form vouchsafed no answer to his challenge; he felt the perspiration oozing out upon his forehead in icy beads.

"Who are you?" he demanded again, though with faltering voice.

There was a metallic "click," a sliding sound—a bright ray of light darted full in his face, discovering its pallor and startled look.

The figure had opened a dark lantern on him. Then, from behind the light, which obscured the one who held it, came a sepulchral tone:

"Evard Greville."

"Ay, Evard Greville!" exclaimed the young man, breathing freer at this evidence of the other's humanity. "What do you want of him?"

"Evard Greville," repeated the unseen, slowly.

"What mummery is this? Show yourself to me, whoever you are."

Had he been unincumbered, he would have sprung forward and solved the mystery, for he was not a coward; yet there was a bewildering air about the strange presence, which might still have held him in awe.

"If you would see my face, then follow—follow, Evard Greville."

The light began to recede. Step by step he advanced.

As they passed a lounge in the entry, he laid Hermoine upon it, still keeping his eyes bent on the lantern.

Along the hall, into a side passage, slowly on they went; the silence grew deeper; momentary chills were creeping over him, for, though he

knew the dark visitant was a man, like himself, there was a something which whispered enigmatical threatenings in his ear.

"How much further? Cease this. Show yourself—if you dare."

The light suddenly paused.

"Evard Greville, what have you done? Beware!—crime has its punishments, sooner or later, and your time may be close at hand."

"What have I done, that you are here to question me?"

"Where is Mortimer Gascon?"

"Ha!—you—what of him?"

"Ay, 'what of him?' Where is he, I ask?"

"What do I know of Mortimer Gascon?"

"He came to your house a month ago," continued that deep, toomby voice. "To-day he lay in a room up-stairs—now he is gone. Where is he?"

"Out! I know nothing of him!"

"You lie, Evard Greville—"

"Ha! you dare—"

"Stand off!" as the young man started forward with fist clenched. "I hold a cocked pistol leveled at your heart. One more step, and you die!"

Evard shrunk back. As he did so, the figure spoke again.

"What you can not answer, I can answer for you; Mortimer Gascon is dead."

"Yes, he is dead. What of it?" with an accent of defiance.

"Evard Greville, three years ago a happy family lived in peace in this city. Now, there is not one left. The family left great wealth, which went to one Mortimer Gascon; then, in case of his death, to his niece and nephew, Hermoine and Evard Greville. Your hand struck out the life of each—sent all before the bar of Heaven to charge you as their murderer!"

"It's a lie!"

"You managed it all, that you and Hermoine might inherit. But, there is more yet; Hermoine has to learn what I know. Evard Greville, when his parents died, was in New Orleans. He never came North; but another did; that other was named *Carl Grand*; and it was Carl Grand who had destroyed the family, in keeping with the *pledge of the bullet-scar*!"

His listener was trembling.

"A lie, I say!—all a lie!"

"You doubt my knowledge of what you have done?—behold!"

The speaker turned the lantern's rays upon his own face. He had no sooner done so than Greville uttered a sharp cry, and staggered backward to the wall.

"Behold!—one victim escaped you." But Greville heard him not; he was lying insensible on the floor, his upturned face white and cold as marble.

A few moments the mysterious personage stood contemplating the motionless form; then, extinguishing the lamp, he stole noiselessly away—retracing his steps along the entry, descending the stairs, and passing out at the front entrance.

"What's that?" he exclaimed, pausing, with the door half-closed.

"*Ha! ha! ha!*" rung through the house in a wild, unearthly strain.

It startled him, for he shut the door with a bang, and leaped down the steps.

When next we see him, he is turning the corner at Washington and Ada streets. A cab was standing near, which seemed to be awaiting him, for he immediately got into it, saying:

"Now then, to the tunnel—go! Ply your whip!"

The vehicle was soon speeding onward, its occupant sitting stiff and silent, while, had it been possible to see his face, we would have marked therein an expression of intense satisfaction.

"Let him tremble now!" he muttered with a grit of his teeth. "Jose Moreno is not dead yet—Madre! no. Ha! h-a-a!"—a savage chuckle—"look to yourself, Carl Grand! You may think that, as you are warned, you will escape! Try it! 'Wrong for wrong,' is my motto; and I never forgive!"

When the cab paused at the west end of the tunnel, it was approached by a man who wore a heavy slouched hat pulled down over his brow, till only a heavy growth of beard, and a pair of dagger-like eyes were visible.

"Come, Miguel," said the one in the cab, throwing open the door.

"Am I not coming?" returned this new party, in a surly tone.

Stepping inside, he seated himself with a bump that threatened to start the springs, and vented a grunt, as he settled himself comfortably.

"You are liquor-soaked!" catching a dense odor of whisky in the other's breath.

"Can you blame me?"—growingly. "Cospita! how long have you kept me waiting?—hours! And between each I wedged a glass of spirits, so that I could count them better."

"I have been to the house of Carl Grand."

"Don't I know that?"—snappishly.

"And I have learned something."

"What is it, then?"

"Mortimer Gascon, the last of the doomed line, was killed to-night!"

"So! Well?"

"Hercules, the Hunchback, was the instru-

ment used by Carl Grand, in carrying out the pledge of the bullet-scar!"

"Hercules, the Hunchback!" cried Miguel, in astonishment; "why, we pitched him from a roof, in New Orleans—"

"True; yet he is here. I saw him. He bore the mark of my knife on his temple."

"The fellow is a cat!—he has nine lives!"

"More: the old wench, his mother—as he calls her—is close by, too."

"No! And we killed her, besides—"

"Tried to, and failed. A word from Hercules, or from the negress, will send us to the gallows, perhaps."

"Cospita! it is horrible to be hanged! This is news. We must find her—eh?" and the "eh" had a significant prolongation as it came from the Spaniard's lips.

"There'll be no trouble in it. I followed her to her den this morning."

"Good! we'll visit her at once—eh? This time we'll make sure, purposely to spite the Hunchback. I hate him, because he did not die when we tried to make him do so?—well, what ails you, fellow?"

The cab had halted, and the driver was peering in through the box-window.

"I say, is it here you want to stop?"

Jose glanced out.

"Yes," he said. "Come on, Miguel."

The two alighted, and paying the man, moved away.

Skulking along South Water street for some distance—proceeding in a manner honest men do not assume—they presently stopped before a narrow, private alley, next to a gloomy warehouse.

"Miguel."

"Well, I am here," growled Miguel.

"Be quick!"

They vanished in the dark shade of the alley, and, with cat-like tread, continued on.

Into a yard of cramped limit; then they advanced to a cellar-door.

"Who's that?" challenged a low voice.

"Jose Moreno."

"Glad to see you, captain—pass."

A man stood flat against the wall of the building, invisible at a distance of five feet. He was evidently a guard.

Our party of two raised the cellar-door, and descended—to be faced by four ghoulish-visaged ruffians who seemed at first to regard them as intruders, for one presented a cocked pistol.

"Put away your weapon," said Jose.

"Glad to see you, captain!" exclaimed the four, together.

Let us make a note of this significant assemblage.

They were in the rear cellar of the warehouse. On all four sides brackets were fixed in the walls, and from the brackets dark-lanterns shot forth their rays to a common center.

A glance at the four men discovers them to be hardened ruffians, strong of limb and muscle, repulsive in feature, by nature devilish, by profession, thieves.

Jose Moreno—called their captain—was a Spaniard. He was of slim figure, supple, elastic; his face wearing an expression not overgood, while the glance of his eye was full of a snaky sparkle.

He who accompanied Jose was also a Spaniard. He stood about five feet, four inches; was nearly as broad as tall. His countenance of beard and bloat had a treacherous mold; his carriage was dare-devil—with a swagger, and jerk of the shoulders; his whole appearance that of a half-reckless, half-cowardly bully, and a man to be feared in the dark.

His first utterance was a snarl at the man who had drawn the pistol.

"Look, now; shall I twist your head off? Hide that pistol, or—"

"Tut! tut! Miguel," interrupted Jose; "what use in threatening a comrade?"

"He's a fool. Let him learn manners. He should know better than—Hold, captain! I don't quarrel with you!" the last as Jose frowned and took a step toward him.

"Quiet yourself, then," advised Jose; and he continued, to the others: "Our plans, comrades—are they laid?"

"Yes."

"So? Let me see."

"One of them handed him a roll of parchment. It was a map of the city."

As he glanced over it he said:

"These dots, here, tell where you will light the fires?"

"Yes."

"You must be sure to act all at once."

"No fear on that—eh, comrades?" exclaimed their spokesman.

"No fear," answered the three, in chorus.

"They will botch it, I wager—" began Miguel.

"Quiet!" ordered Jose.

"Am I not quiet enough?" growled the Spaniard.

"Do this thing well," continued their captain, and we'll have the city ablaze. Chicago will fall in ashes—and then we may choose to suit, among the plunder. Every thing is as dry—"

"As I am!" inserted Miguel. "I have not drank for an hour past."

"Off, now. See that each man applies his torch when the clock strikes twelve."

Each took a lantern from its bracket, and moved toward the door.

"Halt there!" interposed Miguel. "Will you leave us in the dark? Devil catch you! I'll hold, captain! I don't quarrel with you!"

Jose had him by the collar.

"That tongue of yours wags too glib."

"And why should it not?" returned the bully, half whining. "I must move it, else it will stick fast, it is so dry. There! we are in the dark. A ghost will grip us!"

"We, too, have business. Come."

"The sooner the better. Let us be out of this black hole—oh! ow! ouch! oo-o-o!"

"Fool! You will have the police down on us! What's the matter?"

In his haste to ascend the ladder-steps, Miguel had tripped and scraped his shins severely.

"O-h! my legs—captain! my legs—they are broken!"

"Bah! go on."

When they reached the gate, Jose paused, and Miguel grunted as he ran against him.

"Sh!"

"Sh!" imitated Miguel.

"Do you know where we are going?"

"How should I, when you haven't told me?" exclaimed the Spaniard, under his breath.

"While our men are setting fire to the city, we'll go to the negress who calls herself the mother of Hercules."

"Good!"

"Sh!"

"Sh!" imitated Miguel, again.

"We know that she buried money in New Orleans—"

"So we do—" breaking in; "but where? Did we not half strangle her, and then toss her into the Basin? Yet, did we find out? Devil catch her! she has died once, and will die again, before—"

"No harm in trying. She may know us better now."

"True. Lead on, captain," but he added, quickly: "Look, now; she can fight furiously!"

"You do not fear her?"

"Boo! fear a woman?—not I. Who says I ever ran from a woman?"

"Come on—sh!"

"Sh!" and Miguel tip-toed after the captain.

"See!" exclaimed Jose, suddenly. "Some one is ahead of us!"

"Cospita! yes."

They saw a bright glare in the heavens, and, in the same moment the quick strokes of the alarm-bells rung out on the air.

CHAPTER V.

ZONE AND HER LOVER.

FOR some time Evard Greville lay insensible in the darkness of the room where he had been confronted by a face which caused him a deep, mysterious, overpowering dread.

But his brain was too excited by the events of the evening—dependent of his fear, when discovering the identity of the figure—to permit of a long unconsciousness.

When he recovered, it was with a gasp, and a nervous contraction of limb which brought him to a sitting posture; and he stared wildly around, trying to pierce the thick gloom.

Then he listened, as if expecting to hear a footfall, or the respiration of another presence.

All was still. His heart thumped; he trembled despite himself.

Slowly he regained his feet, and groped toward the mantlepiece.

Striking a light, he turned quickly, as though to meet the attack of an enemy lurking near him.

By the stare of his eyes, the flush of his countenance, tremor of either lip, and twitching of the fingers, we see plainly that the strange, unexpected visit had some powerful effect—causing him, even now, in the bright blaze of the chandelier, to glance fearfully about, and breathe like one who had issued, panting and warm, from a deadly struggle.

"Gone!" he ejaculated, feverishly. "It was Jose! The grave has, indeed, given up its dead! It is fate! What shall I do?—ah! Hermoine!" He suddenly recollected that he had left Hermoine unconscious, on the lounge in the entry.

With a quick step, he left the room.

But she was gone! She was not on the lounge, nor was there any answer when he loudly called her name.

For a brief space he forgot the recent ordeal in the utter astonishment created by her disappearance.

"Poor Hermoine!" he broke forth, musingly. "She is disfigured for life. How I have grown to love that girl—oh! take care, Carl Grand—take care—it is not yet time for her to learn that you are not her brother. You may love her if—what's that?"

He heard wheels outside on the street. A vehicle of some kind passed before the door.

He looked at his watch.

It is the cab I ordered. I must disappoint Hercules. I guess he will not be very angry, if I have the money ready when he comes to growl his dissatisfaction. It is time for me to go and

see Zone. And why do I go to see her at all? Yes—I love both Hermoine and Zone—"

"Clang! clang! spoke the bell in the hall below.

"Hermoine! where are you?" he called out for the last time.

There was no response.

"Perhaps she has recovered and gone to bed, or into the garden. Pah! I have no time to worry over her now."

Descending the stairs, he snatched his hat from the rack and went out at the front door.

"Time, sir," said the cabman, who stood on the steps.

"Number — Polk street," he ordered, as he seated himself inside the conveyance.

As he was borne along, his thoughts centered again on his late visitor.

"Yes, it was Jose Moreno. What can he mean to do? If I could but get at his intentions, I'd thwart them. Will he charge me, openly, with having attempted his life?—faster, there, driver!—and send me to prison for the murder of Evard Greville? What a fool I was! I might have killed him then, to a certainty, had I not fainted like a baby!" one hand gliding to a revolver in the pistol pocket of his pants.

"And, perdition! he might have killed me for revenge, while I lay there helpless. Yes, I have been a fool! Give me another chance, Jose Moreno, and if I don't bore a hole through your brain, then proclaim me to the authorities!"

He continued these meditations inwardly, settled back in the cushions, and folded his arms.

Reaching the house to which Hercules had conveyed Mortimer Gascon, he entered by means of a key which he had in his pocket.

"Now, the direction was: 'Follow to the source of the entry light,'—proceeding up the stairs—"then, the first door to the right"—so—here it is," and Evard Greville found himself face to face with the masked queen, as he opened the door in obedience to instructions he had received.

"Zone, I am here."

"Welcome, Evard."

The words that came from behind the mask were low and sweet; she held out her gloved hands, and he took them in his own with a warm pressure.

"Sit down, Evard."

At one side was a rich sofa, and toward this she drew him, seating him beside her.

"Zone, why is it I am so happy when with you?"

"Perhaps you love me," promptly.

"She is right," he thought; and then aloud: "Yes, Zone, it is because I love you. You are a good guesser. And dare I hope—"

"How can you love one whose face you have never seen?" she interrupted, laughing lowly—a silvery ripple that was like the murmur of a fairy brook.

"I'll venture."

There was a pause. Her beautiful eyes turned to the carpet, and she appeared to be thinking.

"What is it, Zone?"

"Evard, how much would you do for me—"

"Any thing," fervently.

"I am about to ask a favor."

"Well?"

"Do you believe in the art I profess?"

"I never did believe in fortune-tellers, Zone, until I met you. My love for you has converted me."

"I had a dream last night."

"A dream!" he exclaimed, playfully.

"It is the dream which makes me ask the favor. Listen: I thought I was in your house. I was wandering along until I came to a desk. By my side, following close, was a spirit. This spirit bade me open the desk. I did so. In a drawer, or box, I saw a roll of parchment, tied with a black ribbon, and the ribbon secured by a black seal—what is it, Evard?"

"Nothing, Zone; go on."

She had felt the hand she held suddenly start and tremble. But he was outwardly calm, and deeply interested.

"I thought this spirit wished me to take up the parchment," she continued; and in the same breath, hastily: "See!—see there! There is the same spirit which followed me in my dream!"

"Zone!"

"Look!" pointing across the room, "see it, Evard!"

"Zone, you jest. There is nothing there."

"Nothing there!" impatiently. "Do you laugh at me? See! it is bidding me go on. Listen."

Evard Greville was not, naturally, superstitious, though his love for Zone had led him into a feeling of awe toward her. He forced himself to believe much of the strange sayings she had poured into his ears on previous occasions; but never, till now, had she gone so far as to inform him of the presence of a spirit!

He looked at her fixedly, undecided whether to protest or pay attention. And in that indecision he was silent.

Zone went on, rocking slightly to and fro while speaking, as if under some mesmeric influence.

"When told to search the parchment, I re-

fused, from some cause. The spirit frowned. It frightened me. I put forth my hand to obey—when, just at that point, I awoke. It was not much of a dream, yet—ah! now look!"—again pointing across the room. "The spirit is still there! In its hand is the very roll! Hear!—it whispers—"

He could see that her eyes no longer flashed upon him; they were closed.

"It whispers; it tells me you know where that parchment is—tied with a black ribbon, sealed with a black seal. You must procure it for me."

"Zone!"

"Hush! Hear; yes, you must procure it—only you—and bring it to me."

She ceased abruptly. Again those brilliant orbs in the eyelets of the mask were gazing at him.

"Evard, do you know of such a parchment?"

"Zone, I—" he hesitated.

"I see, you do. You must find it, and bring it to me. When working with my instruments, to-day, I had to cease. Until I get that parchment, I can not go on with what I am doing. You will do what I ask?"

"Yes—I will do so."

He glanced at her in a peculiar way. Through his brain flashed the following:

"By heaven! the girl must be a sorceress! The very parchment I have noticed, a dozen times, in the secret pigeon-hole of my desk in the library. What can it contain? What does she want with it?"

"Hark!"

"What did you hear?"

"The bells! There must be a fire."

"Oh, I heard the alarm some time ago."

"But I did not—"

"You were communing with—"

"Let us take a look."

She ran to the window, and threw open the shutters; for she had heard another sound. The tramp of feet, the rumble of wagons, loud cries, all mingled in a din to make her fear the fire was close at hand.

And she was right.

Looking out, she drew back, with a startled exclamation.

"Evard! The heavens are on fire!"

"Say, rather, the whole city is burning up!"

They saw great tongues of flame shooting upward. In the street below, crowds were hurrying past, and yells and curses, and the screams of affrighted ones, greeted them, as they remained transfixed in their gaze upon the scene.

Already, a house directly opposite, was catching the hungry element on its roof. A cloud of smoke, and shower of sparks, hurled in their faces by the driving gale, forced them away from the window.

"Come, come! we have not a moment to lose!" she cried, excitedly.

They could hear the great roar of wind and flame as it rapidly advanced.

But Zone paused suddenly in her flight. She had thought of Mortimer Gascon.

"I cannot go! Merciful heaven!—begone, Evard! Save yourself!"

"Zone, are you crazy? I will not leave you here. Come!"

"No! no! I tell you to save yourself! Fly while you have time—"

"This is madness! We shall be burned alive! Will you come?"

Just then rung a voice in the lower hall.

It was the Hunchback.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

JOSE and Miguel moved rapidly away from the rendezvous, watching as they went the increasing glare of the fire.

The direction they pursued was almost in a direct line toward that point where the flame first fanned into a blaze, though after a long walk they turned and continued along to Jackson street.

"Cospita!" exclaimed Miguel, "the whole city is going. See, captain! as I live I saw the flames!"

"So much the better," returned Jose. "Some accident, perhaps, has set off the dry houses, and our men will make it a conflagration ere it ends. But wait; still now. Here's the house."

"She lives well," commented Miguel, on the building before which they paused.

"No one is near," said Jose, whisperingly, as he glanced around.

"Yes—there's a dog. Shall I make him snarl for company's sake?" picking up a stone as he spoke.

"Fool! you will ruin us. Come, now, follow."

"Lead on, captain; I'm not afraid."

In the back basement of the house a negress sat rocking a crib, and lowly humming a tune, the words to which she deciphered with much trouble in a worn book which she held.

She was over sixty years. Her face was black as chaos; her form, as if untouched by the warps of Time, was heavy and muscular.

The rays from the lamp on the mantel-piece, fell upon the crib and its occupant—the latter a beautiful boy of not more than five summers.

In his face there was a celestial sweetness of expression; the long, dark lashes, pure skin with rosy color, and lips of carmine, contrasting in a fairy picture with the profusion of golden curls that seemed to quiver on the downy pillow.

But he was not asleep, as the woman supposed him to be. Two large, wondrous eyes, deep as the blue of the skies at midnight, were fixed upon her, gazing steadily into the dark-skinned features, and half intent with listening to her weird notes.

After a while the book was lowered to her lap. She looked down at the floor, the humming ceased—reverie enslaved her.

Then her meditations formed into speech.

"Three long years!—three long years!" she uttered, slowly, "and here's little Carl kept from what belongs to him. Six long years!—six long years! and Zone, dear child, hasn't got the records yet. I wonder if she'll ever get them? And that Hermoine, too, has played cunningly. Carl Grand, with all his brain, don't know who she is yet. I wonder if he'll ever find her out? If Zone can get the records, then she won't have any more use for Carl Grand—and she'll keep her vow. What a pity, when her father killed the mother of Carl Grand, there was life enough left in the dying woman to tell her son she was the victim of a *vendetta*. And then, how shrewd to write that false note, which set Carl Grand on the track of the Grevilles, and made him swear by the bullet-scar in his palm, never to rest till all of the line of Greville were exterminated. He! he! he! There wasn't much trouble in getting Hermoine to believe *half*—for that was all he told her. He didn't tell her that he had killed her father and mother; no. But it was a story to suit his plans. Her father and mother?—ha! ha! ha! And he would have killed her, too, only he fell in love with her! What if he knows that Hermoine is playing a game as bold as his own—eh? what then? And what would they both say if they knew I had little Carl here, safe, where they can't—"

"What's that you're talking about, Aunt Lu?"

The negress started.

"Nothing, nothing, child. Bless the boy! I thought you were sound asleep. There, now, you just turn right over and shut them eyes—ha! who's you? What you want?" the last with a quick sharp intonation of voice, as two figures leaped in at the open window and confronted her.

Jose and Miguel.

"What you want here, I say? Ah—it's Jose Moreno! You tried to kill old Lu once!"

"Yes, it's Jose Moreno, you hag! You recollect when we half strangled you?—and Miguel helped."

"What you want here, I say?" scowling defiantly.

"Your money!" growled Miguel. "Come, show us where it is, or, by the horns of Lucifer, we will strangle you again!"

"I'm not afraid of you!" defied the negress.

"Better go 'long."

"Look, now, I'll scare you to death!" and Miguel advanced, frowning.

Quick as a flash her brawny arms shot out; there was a dull *thud*—he went spinning across the room, stumbling, striking the wall, then falling to the floor with a painful snort.

"Devils catch you! you've bruised me!" he snarled, scrambling to his feet. "I'll have your life for that!"

"At her, Miguel!" cried Jose.

With long knives gleaming in their fists, they darted upon her.

But the negress was ready.

Lifting the boy from his crib, and perching him upon her shoulder, she snatched up a pair of tongs with her disengaged hand.

At the sight of the boy, Jose half paused, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

But that pause was only for a second. In another moment came the clash of conflict.

Not a sound escaped her lips as she met the fierce attack of the two men—circling, darting, swinging, sweeping the tongs above, in front, behind, around her—parrying their knife-blows, and anon dealing a well-aimed stroke that made them stagger and reel.

Now forward, now backward; the bright steel ringing against her weapon, but never touching her. And in her black eyes, there was a burning glow that told of a determination to fight to the death.

Suddenly she became the attacking party.

There was a marvelous strength in that right arm of hers, for it beat them back, back until they pressed the walls, and fought desperately now to save their heads from being crushed.

"Ha! ha-a!" she screamed, "I shall kill you both, presently!"

The Spaniards breathed hard. She was battling with a demoniac fury. In a dozen places they were bruised and welled.

In the midst of it she made a misstep, and tripped!

With a howl, they rushed to a fresh assault.

But, on her knees—for, with her burden, and busy warding off their murderous thrusts, she could not rise—she fought on, fought sternly, terribly, to keep them off.

"Now!" yelled Jose. "At her, Miguel! Let one take a broken head, and the other stab her for his comrade! But, don't harm the boy. I want him!"

"Dios! you may take the broken head, captain, and I'll—ha! now, you wench!"

Jose closed with her. Simultaneously, Miguel, by an adroit movement, gained a hold upon the tongs.

Then, from the lips of the boy, rung one wild, terrified shriek, as he saw the deadly steel ascend in Jose's hand, and poise above his head!

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH FIRE.

LIKE the crash of a myriad cymbals in the hands of demons, rung the alarm bells, a shrieking tocsin, withering timid hearts with its death-knell peals.

Fire! Fire! Fire! To right, to left, in front, behind, everywhere—hissing, surging, roaring—on! on! came the anaconda-like flames, wreathing spout-columns of destruction, and striking terror into the multitude.

Chicago was doomed. With its vast wealth of capital and beauty, it was toppling under the relentless swoop of the Fire-Fiend, rushing forward, on hurricane wings, more fierce, more overwhelming than the death-blast of the desert.

And on the roof of a house in Polk street an exciting scene was progressing, a contest only second to the strife waging between the Destroying Angel and his merciless torch, and the resistance of man.

"Stand back! Stand back!" cried Greville, as the boy, Trix, halted at the frowning muzzle of the pistol. "Stand, I say!—or you die!"

Only the hesitation of a second.

"Let go! Let go—or I'll strike!"

The heavy club twirled in the air.

"Crack!" went the pistol.

The aim was flurried and bad; the bullet missed its mark.

With a yell, Trix struck the weapon from his grasp.

In self-defense, Greville had to loose his hold upon the Hunchback.

They grappled. Evard wrenched the club from him.

But Trix was supple, active, strong. He clung to his antagonist with a wild, clutching embrace, and ground his teeth in fury.

Backward from the eaves, catching short, painful breaths in the thick smoke, hard and savagely each struggled for the mastery.

"Zone! Zone!" cried the Hunchback, the large veins standing out on his face like cords, in the severe physical tax he was enduring, and looking very like a demon himself, in the bright glare, with blood-smeared face and starting eyes.

"Zone! Zone!"

"Hercules! Oh, Heaven—"

"Quick, girl! God give you strength! Catch me about the neck. Quick!"

In a second she had obeyed, clinging to the hold tenaciously.

"Hold fast! Hold fast, now!" swinging round, with a lightning movement, and gaining an additional grip on the eaves, with his released hand. "Now, girl, when I raise you up, reach over, and grasp the inside of the eaves!" the closing order in breathless gasps.

Then, slowly, with the double weight straining those more than human muscles, he drew himself up.

"Keep cool! Keep cool—now!"

Strangely calm throughout the terrible ordeal, she again obeyed him promptly; threw out one hand, and gained the precious hold.

"Now, climb! Climb on my shoulder! Up quickly!"

He forced her upward, again sustaining himself and her by the stern clench of a single hand—a Hercules, indeed.

Soon she was safe upon the roof.

But she paused, uttering a cry.

Two men were swaying dizzily, to one side, on the very edge, battling for life.

As if by mutual consent, they staggered back from the treacherous footing. In the same moment, Trix broke away, and, snatching up the club, bounded to the front of the house.

"Zone!—take care! It is a madman!" shouted Greville.

Hercules was just gaining the roof, his tired strength almost insufficient to extricate him.

He saw his danger, saw the club poised to strike.

"Trix! Boy!—you are mad! Keep off!"

"No!—I'm not mad! I'm not mad!"

"What would yo—urg—g!"

Thud! fell the club. A little truer, and it would have accomplished its murderous intent! Only an inch short—it glanced off the temple, hit the eaves, shot from the hand that held it.

Still the blow was severe. The skin was broken, and fresh blood streamed forth from the wound.

Then a set of snaky fingers closed on the throat of the Hunchback; his vision swam in the vortex of partial insensibility.

"Remember the Rose-Lip!" hissed the boy.

"Murderer of my mother!—remember! It was you who killed Rose-Lip! Die! die die!"

Tighter, tighter pressed the strangling fingers; darker grew the brain of Hercules, as he quivered helplessly, for he dare not let go his hold on the eaves.

Nearly overcome by his wrestle with man, smoke and heat, Greville tottered forward. A blow with his fist laid Trix senseless.

Aided by Zone—who roused from the momentary stupor which seized her when she first saw the men in combat—he grasped Hercules by the collar, and dragged him in.

"Fly!" was the first hoarse word of the rescued man.

Without waiting to hear more, Zone and her lover hurried away over the roofs, fleeing from the devouring fires which roared around them.

But they went alone.

Hercules turned to the trap.

"He must not die!" he muttered. "I must save him, if it cost my life!"

He was thinking of Mortimer Gascon.

After all this trial, danger, excitement, suffering, when nearly suffocated by the dense volumes of smoke enshrouding him—burned, scorched, blistered by flying sparks and spits of flame thrown upon him by the howling wind—blinded with heat and blood—he suddenly remembered the helpless invalid below, and resolved to save him from the horrible death pending.

He heard the window-glass cracking, and jingling as it fell. The house had caught in the sea of flame; not a moment was to spare.

He could hear the loud crash of falling buildings close at hand.

Mortimer Gascon had risen from his couch, and was standing weakly, holding to the bed-frame for support.

"Hercules!—what is all this?" he asked, as the other appeared.

"Judgment Day!—or the army of Satan broke loose!" cried the Hunchback. "The city is doomed! Every house is going to ashes! Hark!—you can hear the flames spurting like fountains! I must use you roughly, Mortimer Gascon, if I would save you. You can not walk!"

As he spoke, he lifted the invalid, and bore him out.

The fire had entered the first and second stories.

Twice was he forced back from the stair-case by the chokeful, cindered air that poured in through the open trap.

But escape by the roof was cut off.

Like a river in mid-air, floated the dread element overhead; to venture out was to die.

Then, down the stairs, groping as if through an oven of heat and mist, the dwarf started with his burden.

"Courage, here! Bury your face in my coat; else you will strangle!"

"Hercules, we are doomed!" moaned Gascon.

"No!" exclaimed the Hunchback, grinding his teeth, part with pain, part with determination. "No!—not doomed, though Satan himself were holding us! Courage, I say."

Ay, courage. Both need it.

It seemed to Gascon his bearer was wading through an avenue of hungry flame, over a bed of coal.

He could hear the singe of hair on the dwarf's head. His own flesh was crisping.

All around them closed the fire-tongues—darting in from every side, searching for that with which to feed their glowing palates.

But Hercules held his burden tighter, and, with a growling cry, pressed onward.

Soon they reached the back door—when lo! it was fastened; and the key had been withdrawn.

Their last hope seemed gone!

Only the spot whereon they had been forced to pause was free from hurt as yet; and this must be enveloped shortly. They had passed through the fire, which now grew more raging behind them, as if angered at their preservation.

Hark! what was that? A dull, crackling sound; the building was sinking in upon them.

At the same instant, there issued from the seething dome above, a demoniacal howl.

"Remember the Rose-Lip! Remember—ha! ha! ha!"

Like a knell of doom it rung in the dwarf's ears, for it recalled a dark scene of the past, more vivid, now, when encompassed by those red walls of death!

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

"HURRY, Zone!—in here, and we are safe. The fire will never come this way."

Evard Greville drew the strange girl into his house, away from the hustling, elbowing, shouting sea of humans, that had almost lifted them from their feet, as they fled with the current of thousands who were driven from their homes on that fearful night.

In the silence of the broad hall they paused—panting with exertion, weak except with excitement—and listened to the din without, which came to their ears like the murmur and surge of a storm-lashed ocean on a rocky shore.

"Hercules!" she exclaimed, suddenly, and in anxious inquiry.

Not until now had they noted his absence.

"He probably lost us in the crowd," returned Greville. "It is too late to think of him now. No doubt he will be here in search of you soon—knowing we fled together. Come with me."

She followed him to the parlor.

The lights were burning just as he had left them when he started, in the early evening, to keep his engagement with the young fortune-teller.

"Alas, Evard! I fear I am ruined."

"Ruined? How?"

"I had a great deal of money in bonds—my all. They were in the Red Room at my house."

"Every thing there is certainly lost. Why did you not think of it before our flight?"

"I scarce know; I was so excited, I forgot."

"You have passed through enough to rob you of reason!" he exclaimed, recalling the recent accident and battle on the roof of Zone's house.

She shuddered at thought of her narrow escape from death.

"All my instruments, too, and books—they are lost."

"You will never need those again, Zone, if you will but return my love."

He fixed his eyes in a passionate gaze on that rude mask, which, he felt sure, was but a screen to features even more beautiful than her form.

But a new thought entered his brain. What if Hermoine should discover Zone?—ascertain the latter's character—a fortune-teller, professing affiliation with spirits of another world, a knowledge of the secrets of the firmament, mesmeric powers, all of which gave her a peculiar sway over that minority of people whose solid sense took flight before the exercise of trickish mystification.

What if Hermoine was listening?—had heard him betray his love for the masked queen?

He knew the woman he called his sister was sensitive, proud, exacting. Then, would there not be discord in the house ere long? He must conduct her elsewhere, and that immediately.

While these conjectures flashed across the mind of Evard Greville, a feeling of equal intensity, though different in mold, was kindling a new excitement in Zone's bosom.

In that house was a record of some kind—of great value to her—tied with a black ribbon, sealed with a black seal. Only Evard Greville knew where it was, only he could give it to her; and she had won his promise to let her have it.

Yet, a plan had formed within her. Why not secure the record herself, since circumstances had thrown her here in its proximity?

"Evard," she said, "I am worried. I fear all is not right with Hercules."

He was returning from the doorway, whither he had stopped to see if Hermoine was eavesdropping.

"Do not be anxious, Zone."

"Yet, Evard, I—"

"What will you have me do?" He saw that she hesitated in asking something.

"Humor me. Won't you go and look for him?"

"As far as the door?"

"No; further. Walk a few squares over the route we came."

"Why, it is folly! The streets are crowded. Even did we meet, we might pass each other unawares."

"Still, I know you will humor me. I am sure he will come that way, if he comes at all; and I would have you hasten him."

Up to this moment he had not recurred, mentally, to his first surprise when, in the house of Zone, he saw that she and the Hunchback were acquainted. Now, the singularity of the occurrence, the signs of recognition between them, struck him.

He was shrewd, keenly perceptive, suspicious by nature—doubly so by his evil life, and consequent fears. Though hoodwinked in more ways than one, owing to his mysterious infatuation with a woman whose face he had never seen, he was yet disposed to question those things which bore semblance to personal involvement.

Instantly he asked himself:

"How came she to know the Hunchback? Why is she so anxious about him?"

He was gazing intently at her.

"Will you go, Evard?"

"Zone," slowly, "how long since you made the acquaintance of Hercules?"

She started as he put the abrupt question; but that start was so adroitly played into another movement it escaped him.

She saw that she had betrayed herself. She must answer promptly.

"I have not known him long, Evard. He saved me from injury about a month ago, from that same mad boy you encountered on the roof. Who he is I know not. But I am twice in his debt now—for my life. Is it not natural that I should feel grateful to my preserver? You would have lost Zone, but for him."

Her closing speech had more effect than all she had said preceding it—as she intended.

Still he asked:

"And who is that mad boy?"

"A stranger. He came to me once to know his fortune. Since the moment of our interview he has—has—"

"Well?"

"Ridiculous as it may seem, Evard, he has loved me. He told me so. I made his tale of affection seem so nonsensical, that I believe it has been the cause of his insanity. And, his love turning to hate, he—"

"Never mind. Wait till I return, and tell me more. I will go after Hercules. But, first, promise me you will not stir from this room—that you make no noise to betray your presence."

"I promise."

She was glad on any condition to see him depart.

Evard Greville walked, with his head hung, after leaving the house. He was pondering deeply.

Hercules, the Hunchback, had been his tool in removing Mortimer Gascon. Hercules and Zone were acquainted. Zone had requested him to give her a certain parchment roll, which, through some mystery, she knew to be where he could find it. What use had she for that parchment? Should he believe in the recent sorcery at the house of the fortune-teller?

Items of this ilk were not overlooked by a man of his character, even under the spell of love. He had thought himself to sift those complications in life which bore directly on personal surrounding; and with crime on his conscience, fear of his late ghostly visitor in his heart, and conjectures as to the extent of the intimacy existing between Hercules and Zone, coming to his meditations, he had not taken a dozen steps ere he forgot why he was there on the street—oblivious to the great excitement prevailing on every side, heedless of those who rushed past him with a push and a jolt, sending up the scorching cry of "fire" from their hoarse throats.

When he left the parlor he closed the door, and Zone heard him turn the key in the lock.

She arose quickly, and tried the knob.

"He has fastened me in!" she exclaimed, lowly. "What shall I do? Lu said the old desk must be in the house; and the records are in the desk—hark! what's that?"

There was a light footfall in the entry; the rustle of a dress told it was a woman.

She drew back, glancing around her for a place of concealment. She was as anxious to remain unseen as was Evard Greville to have her presence kept secret.

"I must not be found here; it will ruin my plan. Perhaps it is a servant, and she will depart soon—if she enters at all, since the door is locked."

Before she could take a step, the door flew wide open.

"Delia Rivers!—she here!"

It was Hermoine. But how much unlike the beautiful woman of a few hours gone!

The plaster over the ugly knife-wound was displaced a little, and clots of blood stained her cheeks—cheeks of a deathly hue. The lips were purpled and swollen, as if she had been cruelly biting them with her white, even teeth; her hair was disheveled; her attire was torn and loose; and in her large, lustrous eyes there was a peculiar, vacant stare, that could have but one meaning—insanity.

She smiled strangely, in a way idiotic, and beckoned, with a nervously-working hand, to Zone, who stood transfixed in contemplation of the unexpected sight.

"See!", said the maniac, in a voice so low, so weird, so melodious, that it sounded like the liquid murmur of some unearthly instrument, "he imprisoned you. It was unkind, wasn't it? But I'll liberate you. How queer you look! What's that on your face? Take it off—don't be afraid; I won't hurt you. Ha! ha! ha! Come—come with me, I say; I'll take you away from prison. Come—come—come—" She receded slowly, beckoning Zone to follow.

CHAPTER IX.

JOSE MORENO SECURES A PRIZE.

"STRIKE! Strike now!" roared Miguel, as he wrenched the tongs from their intended victim, and caught her arm in a vice-like grip.

Shriek after shriek rung from the lips of little Carl.

Lu was silent. She glared upon them with a deadly hate burning in her great, starting eyes, and breathed hard between her tight-locked teeth.

She might have saved herself from the impending blow, by letting go the boy and springing backward; but this she would not do.

She saw that Jose had determined on gaining possession of the child, and a resolution to prevent this had alone nerved her to a threefold strength in her desperate resistance.

But Jose found it difficult to make the fatal thrust, without injury to the boy.

"Strike, there!" snarled Miguel, again, as he held on to the arm which still fought him, while the negress kept her eyes fixed upon Jose Moreno. "Strike, now! What are you at?—there'll be a botch here, presently!"

And all the while Lu was dragging herself

back, back—a fearful struggle, such as can only be where it is a fierce contest for life, with odds on a murderous side.

Miguel was enraged. Busying himself with striving to give his companion a chance for the death-stroke, he was, at the same time, growling monstrous oaths, swearing by gasps, cursing the negress for her courage and endurance.

Suddenly, the glittering steel hissed downward. The blade was crimsoned by a spurt of blood.

With a moaning cry, she sunk over, and Jose snatched the screaming boy from her arms.

"Out of this quickly, now!" Jose cried, stifling Carl with his broad hand!

"Out it is!" exclaimed Miguel. "Curse the wench!—did I not say she would fight furiously? I am bruised to death!"

Jose was disappearing through the doorway—Miguel was following, when he felt a pair of long arms glide around him.

Ere he could recover from his surprise, he was hurled to the floor.

The negress had not been killed, as the villains supposed; but on her neck was a broad, bleeding gash that told how near the knife had striven for its mark.

She glowered over him, one knee on his breast, one hand at his throat—the other clenched and quivering aloft.

"Devils! you are alive again!" ejaculated the astounded ruffian.

"Yes!" she hissed, burying that claw-like hand deeper and deeper in his flesh; "I'm alive! You thought you'd killed old Lu, eh?—you thought you'd killed me! You tried to do 't once before, in New Orleans! But you couldn't! Ha! h-a-a! I have you, now!—I have you!" jerking him roughly and bumping his head spitefully.

He essayed, in vain, to release himself. He was strangling. That savage hold on his throat was closing tighter, tighter, till his ears were ringing and his face purpling.

"Leave off! Hag!—don't you see you are hurting me?" he articulated, in a half-choked, ludicrous whine.

"Hurting you!—hurting you, am I? Yes—I'll kill you! I'll kill you!"

Despite the process of strangulation, Miguel roared, raved, snarled, blasphemed—all uselessly; he was taken at a disadvantage, she had him firmly pinned, and, angered by the smart of the wound she had received, she pulled, shook, scratched, choked him, dealt him blows with her bony fist, while he writhed beneath her like a conquered giant.

Suddenly she desisted. She heard the tramp of feet in the entry.

A terrific kick burst the door open with a rattling quiver, and a wild-looking being, bearing a human burden, staggered drunkenly into the room.

It was the Hunchback, with Mortimer Gascon!

In her astonishment at his unexpected presence, his terrible appearance, she released her enemy and sprung up.

Miguel was gone with the quickness of a flash—leaping out at the window, and dashing off at a furious pace.

"Cospita!" he muttered, as he found himself in the midst of confusion and terror that prevailed in the street. "What's this, now? Devils catch me! the whole city is afire! Where's the captain? Ha! he lied to me. He said Mortimer Gascon was dead; and I have just seen Mortimer Gascon with his eyes open! There's mystery! Hey, girl—stop! Look, now; by the imps! here's a sweet rose." The last to a fleeing girl, who was staggering weakly, half-delirious, along with the affrighted throng.

By the bright glare, which lit up the street like a sun at midnight, he saw that she was beautiful of form and feature. Instantly his blue eyes burned with a lustful gaze.

"Will you stop?" seizing her by the wrist.

"Oh, sir!—help me—help me—I cannot go much further; I am falling. I shall perish!"

"Look, now; I'll help you—if you will kiss me once, with those red lips—"

He had placed an arm round her waist, when she uttered a scream and struggled to free herself.

"Lynch him! Lynch him!" yelled a voice.

A youthful figure launched itself upon Miguel, and dealt the latter a shot-like blow in the face.

"Take that!—devil eat you!" howled the ruffian, as he felled his assailant with one sweep of his ponderous fist.

But Miguel was now in trouble. The girl escaped him; several of the throng were rushing upon him, their cries telling of a determination to punish him summarily.

He was enraged, yet his rage was wise; and his discretion, coupled to a half-fear for his personal safety, caused him to wheel and—run against a diminutive object, overturning it completely, and ringing from it an ear-splitting squeal.

The object was a man, very short, very thin, who carried a carpet-bag. As he tumbled, the carpet-bag whizzed from his hand, and Miguel snatched it up, continuing his flight with the stolen property under his arm.

"Stop thief!" yelled the diminutive man, darting after the Spaniard with the velocity of a meteor.

And as he ran, he was saying, muttering, crying to himself:

"That's him! That's Miguel! How fortunate! I'm on the track! Hooray!—stop thief! I'm after the whole nest now, certain! Stop thief!—stop thief!"

"Stop thief!" bellowed the pursuing crowd.

Among the dense mass of men, women and children that poured through the Washington street tunnel, flying from the red-hot walls which were closing on the doomed city, a man was excitedly elbowing his way, glancing back occasionally, with an anxious expression on his swarthy face.

This man was Jose Moreno. In his arms he carried the boy, Carl, and anon he hissed in the ears of the terrified child:

"Be still!—be still, I say, or I shall kill you!"

There was an exultant gleam in his dark eyes, a steely glitter that bespoke, together with the grim wreathing of his lips, a secret rejoicing.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER AN ENEMY.

HEMMEDED in on every side by the licking fires that spat upon them as if with a devilish glee; weakened of heart by the demoniac voice that issued through the flames above; nigh filled with despair at finding the door—their only hope—fastened, Hercules groaned aloud and in spirit, and, setting Mortimer Gascon on his feet, he pressed his burned and blistered hands to his throbbing temples.

The heat was terrible. Denser with the lapse of every second closed the seething walls around them; death seemed inevitable.

But the indomitable nature of the Hunchback was not yet conquered.

"Courage!" he hissed, with a stifled breath. "Courage, Mortimer Gascon; we are not dead yet—God! how hot! Bear up! Bear up!"

Stripping the coat from his back, he threw it around the invalid's head.

"Wrap your face tightly!" he managed to articulate; "pull it close, for your life!"

Then, as if gifted with a fresh energy, he drew off a pace or two—suddenly casting himself, with a battering plunge, against the door.

The panel cracked. Again and again he threw himself forward, his dwarfed, yet Herculean form striking the door with an almost restless force.

Presently, the panel yawned. Round the small opening clinched those fingers of iron, with muscles of steel and giant strength.

Crack! Crack! gave the stuff in his mad-dened grip.

And there was another crackling sound, a sound as of a dull explosion mingled with the strain of weighty timbers.

"The roof!" moaned Gascon. "It is falling in! The walls are tottering!"

Hercules uttered a sharp, yelping cry, and tugged and wrenched at the opening with a desperate fury.

"Stand fast!" he gasped.

He hurled himself through at last; then turned to his companion and dragged the weak form after him.

By a miracle, the back of the house was not yet consumed in the raging element; an avenue of escape—though dangerous—lay open; and panting in the heated atmosphere, the dwarf once more took him in his arms, and staggered away.

None too soon. With a roaring crash, like rattling musketry, the building fell, shooting a tower of cindered flame high into the air, and rolling a cloud of sparks on! on! in the hurtling gale, to aid the Fire-Fiend at his hellish work.

At the same moment Hercules effected his escape at the rear of the burning building, there was a loud jingle of breaking glass at the front as the Indian boy, Trix, cast himself out of one of the second-story windows.

It was like the apparition of a demon, as he shot from the glowing mass, and descended with terrific velocity to the street below.

But he struck without so much as spraining an ankle, and, uttering a shrill scream, darted off, with clothes ablaze, and swinging his arms wildly.

"Thank God! we are saved!" exclaimed Gascon, as he and the dwarf got further and further from danger.

"Not saved yet, Mortimer Gascon! The fire is close on us!—and I am weakening. But, courage! When I cry 'enough,' then we'll say our prayers and die!—and I shall never cry that word!"

He was making for the house of Lu, the negress.

After a severe struggle with his overtaxed nerves, he finally reached the goal.

Reeling in, as we have seen, he dropped his burden, and sunk forward on his knees, completely exhausted.

So wild and disfigured, ay, hideous, was his

face, that the negress did not, at first, recognize him.

But then she cried out in amazement:

"What's this?—Hurl!"

"It is what is left of him!" he broke in, half madly. "See us! we are nearly burned to ashes!"

Then, for the first time, the murmuring tumult of the night attracted her.

"What is it?" she asked. "What's all that noise about?"

"Noise! Where have you been? Been asleep? Are you deaf?—blind?—that you ask me what it means? The whole city is being swept away! The earth is ablaze from end to end! Look there!" pointing to the window.

She hastened to glance out. A quick-breathed exclamation escaped her as she saw the lurid glare, the hurrying people, flying panic-stricken—heard a moaning rumble, as if the thunders of heaven were belching hoarsely in the distance.

But paramount to her thoughts was little Carl. She turned to the Hunchback with a half-cry, half-wail.

"Hurl!—the boy!—the boy!"

"What mean you?" quickly.

"He's gone!"

"Gone!"

"They carried him off!"

"They? Who? Speak out—has anything befallen the child?"

"I tell you he's gone—they carried him off!"

"And I ask who 'they' are? Will you answer?"

"Jose Moreno and Miguel, his follower!"

"No!"

"I tell you *yes*!" she screamed.

"*They* here? Impossible!" and he stared in astonishment.

"Yes, they are here! They've got the boy! They've got Carl! They'll kill him!"

Hercules was on his feet in an instant.

A new strength came to him. The intelligence appeared to rouse him to a state of frenzy, for, while his eyes fairly danced, he cried out:

"Which way? Set me on their track! Be quick—they'll murder him!"

The negress indicated the window, through which she had seen Miguel make his exit.

The dwarf sprung to the pursuit. There was a ferocious gleam in his evil eyes, and his white, regular teeth began to grit and grind till they seemed to be pulverizing.

He reached the street just as Miguel overturned the diminutive man with the carpet-bag.

Muttering an oath of savage frame, he dashed after the Spaniard, soon leading in the race with those who would have punished Miguel for his rude treatment of the girl.

He had recognized an old enemy, a man he hated, and upon whom he had sworn to wreak a terrible vengeance.

To Jose Moreno, and his companion, the bully, Hercules owed that ugly scar on his temple; and now, mad as a bloodhound on the scent of a doomed game, he glided at a pace of incredible swiftness—his face darkly grim, and his hands working as if they were already throttling the object of his hatred.

He saw something in Miguel's arms—thought it must be the child; and this lent a double vigor to his pursuit.

Miguel ran fast. Behind him came the small man whose carpet-bag he had stolen, speeding after his property, and gaining rapidly.

And on pressed Hercules, his dwarfed body appearing even smaller as he bent to the trial of wind and muscle, and flew ahead with the leaps of a race-horse.

"Go it! Go it!" vociferated the man of the carpet-bag, as the Hunchback passed him; "catch him! He's got my clothes! Lord! how that fellow runs! Bet a dollar he's got gum elastic tied to his heels!"

Hercules swept by, as if on the wings of the wind.

Soon the three men left the other parties to the scene far in the rear, and these having more urgent affairs of their own to look after, in the excitement of flight before the conflagration, drew off.

The Spaniard was making for the tunnel, having crossed the Adams street bridge.

Presently he cast a hurried glance over his shoulder. Then he paled, for he saw the form of the Hunchback, knew who it was, and a cowardly fear seized his ruffian heart.

"Devils of earth!" he gasped, in terror; "if he once lays hold upon me, I am a dead man! How came *he* at my heels? And the captain has deserted me! I shall be murdered!" He put his severest bottom to the test, as he sought to escape that dreaded enemy in his rear.

Another glance back; another weakening tremor in the limbs that he worked to their utmost strain.

"Dios! he is gaining on me."

Faster, faster ran Miguel.

But the Hunchback came whizzing on. Not all his fatigue, his torturous condition after having passed the ordeals of our previous chapters, could deter him now; nor could Miguel—though he tried his best—prevent the steady closing up of the space which intervened between him and the man he had good cause to fear.

CHAPTER XI.

A PRIZE FOUND AND LOST.

WHILE Evard Greville had been engaged with Jose Moreno, in the room at the rear of the house, Hermoine had returned to consciousness.

But her return to life was even worse than death—at least, it was no better.

The horrible operation performed by the Hunchback—which, as part of the price demanded for the removal of Mortimer Gascon, we know was at the instigation of Zone—had so worked upon her nerves, that the brain was shocked, and Reason forced from its throne.

As she sat upright on the lounge, she heard voices not far off, and, with an instinctive curiosity, followed in the direction of the sound, tiptoeing stealthily, and pausing, anon, to listen.

Then there was a cessation of the dialogue; she detected the approach of some one, and shrunk back in a niche that was purposed for statuary.

A figure passed by her, treading with a noiseless step.

The maniac followed. As Jose passed out at the front door, it was her laugh, so wild and strange, that had startled him, and caused him to quicken his departure.

After a few moments, she caught the sound of footsteps in the hall above, and fled silently to the garden.

While Evard Greville searched for her, she was hiding in an arbor, laughing to herself as he called her name.

When he returned, after a long absence, accompanied by Zone, she was watching them from the shade of the opposite parlor—her eyes glowing like the orbs of an animal, as she gazed upon the masked girl.

But she did not betray herself—stood motionless and attentive to all that passed, and Greville's avowal of devotion seemed particularly to interest her.

As soon as he left the house, for the second time, she procured another key, and unlocked the parlor door—to confront one who evidently held a secret regarding her; for Zone's immediate exclamation, as the maniac faced her, discovered the fact of this knowledge.

As Hermoine moved away, beckoning Zone to follow, the latter stood as if riveted by an irresistible magnetism, gazing vacantly at the spot where she had stood in the doorway. And in her mind trained these exclamatory thoughts:

"This is Delia Rivers!—the woman I have cause to hate with all my heart! She robbed me of my rights—my all; destroyed my beauty and sought my life! But for my mask, she might have recognized me—though she is crazy, and it has been long since we stood face to face. The last time we met—No matter. What shall I do? The record!—I must have it. But she will watch me now."

She raised her hand to her bosom, where it clasped the pearl hilt of a keen-edged poniard; and beneath the black mask there was a stern, resolute expression of feature.

"Let her watch me then!" she added, half-aloud. "I'll make more disfigurement in her, if she dares too much. O-h! how I *hate* her!"

With a firm, yet silent step she glided out of the parlor.

But she paused, and returned for one of the fancy lamps that stood on the mantelpiece; for the entry was dark and ominous. Then she started again, waving the light before.

Hermoine had disappeared.

Slowly she ascended the stairs. She glanced into the rooms on the second floor. Everything was still within the house.

"Not here. If there is a desk, as Lu said there was, it must be in his library. Where is the library?"

She continued into the back building, occasionally pausing as she went, looking behind, to see if she was dogged.

Though she saw no one, there was a pair of burning eyes fixed upon her, a pursuing form flitted, shadow-like, beyond the reach of the lamp-rays.

Hermoine was noting her every movement.

Soon Zone found what she sought—the library; and there, at one side, was a towering desk of antique finish, combined with a dusty-fronted bookcase.

"Found!" fell whispering from her lips. "It must be here!"

Setting the lamp on a table, she turned to the desk. Drawer after drawer was drawn out, and rummaged by those red-gloved fingers; a pile of papers lay scattered around her; still she did not discover what she wanted.

Then to a row of pigeon-holes in the far interior—pulling out successively the numerous cobwebbed files, and glancing over them with excited eagerness.

And all the while, outside the door, the maniac was intently watching her. While Zone was rapt, oblivious to all else than her search for the article so coveted, Hermoine slipped in, without so much as the rustle of a garment.

She advanced a step, paused, leaned forward with stretched neck, to see what the other was doing—then another step, a second pause, while her face wore a look part vacant, part of inquiry.

Presently, Zone uttered a half-suppressed cry.

She had found the parchment tied with a black ribbon, sealed with a black seal.

"I have it! I have it! Now tremble, Delia Rivers! Ha! ha! ha! At last! At last the game is mine!"

With a trembling hand she broke the seal and tore open the document. Instantly a laugh of

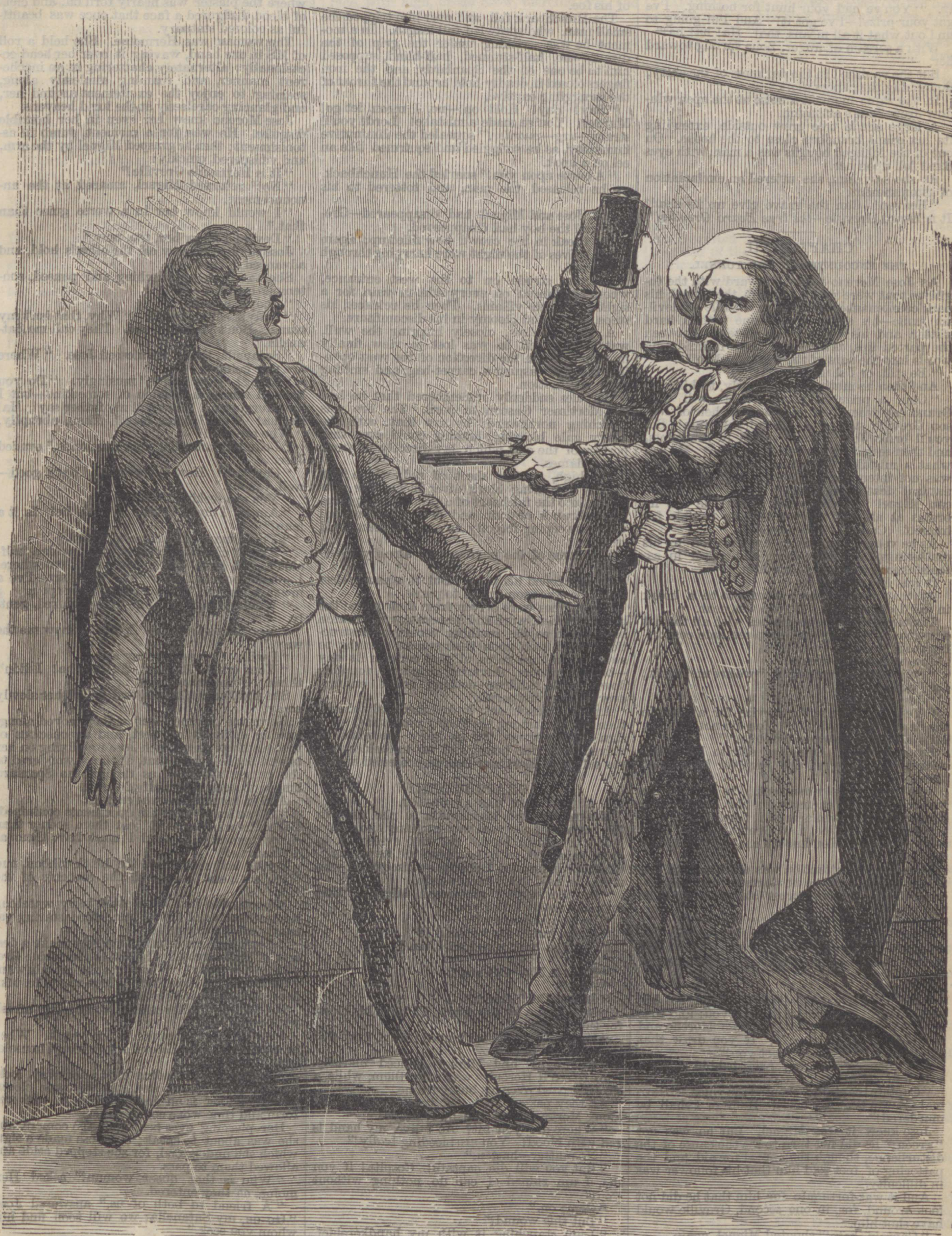
A light weight lay on her shoulder. Hermoine stood beside her.

As she looked up, she started back. Rapid as thought, the poniard leaped, glistening to her hand!

But Hermoine only regarded her steadily, without moving.

"What's it all about?" asked that low, melodious voice, after a brief silence, during which

sentiment toward Hermoine Greville—held Zone silent. At that moment naught but words of taunting triumph could come from her lips; her triumph was over Hermoine. To speak would be to sting the maniac; and in that case, perhaps she was not yet safe in her rejoicing, even though she held the prize in one hand, and a gleaming weapon in the other, with which to defend herself.



"ONE MORE STEP, AND YOU DIE!"—Page 4.

wild joy burst from her lips; and when she had mastered her excitement somewhat, she read the heading to the parchment:

"Last Will and Testament of John Lisle."

The other MS. was a record of some kind.

"Ha! h-a-a! found! Let Delia Rivers look to herself! My triumph is at hand! I—" She stopped short; the words died in a quick gasp.

space the orbs in the mask were fairly scintillating. "Tell me what you mean? You said Delia Rivers, didn't you? Let-me-see—yes, I used to hear that name somewhere. Ha! ha! ha! isn't it queer? You lost something? How did you lose it here? How did it come here?—I never saw you before."

A strong emotion—one fraught with bitterest

Hermoine frowned.

"Won't you tell me? Come, you'd better. I'm queen here; and if you don't tell me, I'll have you put back into prison. When he comes, he'll condemn you, if I tell him to. He loves me, and will do whatever I ask. And I love him, too. I am not his sister; so we'll be married, some day. Do you love him? If I

thought you did, I'd kill you! Ha!—stop!—stop there!"

Zone had wheeled suddenly, and was about to run from the room.

But the maniac was too quick for her—catching her by the dress, and, ere she could endeavor to prevent it, or deal a blow with the sharp poniard, had snatched away the valuable papers.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Hermoine, mockingly. "You've had your hunt for nothing. I've got your prize!—I've got it! And I'm going to find out what it all means, too! Ha! ha! ha!"

With a scream of anger, Zone sprung toward her.

But she vanished in the darkness of the entry, flourishing the papers aloft.

In the same moment a noise at the open window drew Zone's attention.

A large shade tree grew outside, extending its luxuriant branches close to the house. On one of the foliaged boughs was a man, with eyes fixed full upon her.

As she saw him, she uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Heaven! Can the grave give up its dead? It is Evard Greville—the true Evard Greville!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE ENCOUNTER IN THE TUNNEL.

As Jose Moreno pressed onward with the fugitives that were flying through the tunnel, his dark countenance wrinkled in a smile—a devilish smile—his snaky eyes shone with a hard glitter, and his white teeth glistened between the parted lips, as he hissed those intimidating words into the ears of the frightened child:

"Be still, or I shall kill you!"

And then he muttered, jubilantly, to himself: "Oho! a prize! a prize! What will Carl Grand say when I tell him that the heir of Nelson Greville still lives? Admirable fate! So, you'll bribe Jose Moreno to aid in your plots, and then seek to rid yourself of him? Madre! what a mistake. How uncircumspect, when it was not intended that Jose should die an unnatural death! Ha! ha! a prize! But where can Miguel be? Curse the fellow! he has no brains at all, and is ever making trouble for himself. Can he—*The devil!*"

As he vented the closing exclamation to his mutterings, he stopped short and gazed in astonishment on a man before him.

It was Evard Greville.

At that juncture there seemed to be a break in the fleeing crowd. No one was near.

The two men eyed each other with all the hot emotions of enmity and deep-set hate contorting their faces.

Jose was first to speak.

"So," he said, sneeringly, "we are met again, Carl Grand!"

"Jose Moreno!"

"Yes, it is he—at your service for a duel to the death, if you wish it. You did not kill me, after all, most generous employer!"

Evard purpled. One hand slid to his pistol-pocket, and fingered the revolver he carried there.

Jose noted the movement. In a trice he was covering his enemy with the muzzle of a similar weapon, while he said, threateningly:

"One little motion, Carl Grand—just a little—and you die! You know I am one to keep my word."

Then Evard's attention was attracted to the child. At first glance he started; then he whitened, drew one hand across his brow as if he doubted his vision.

"What is that?" he cried. "Who—"

"A-h! you look frightened. Don't you know who it is? Your memory is bad. You forget faces! Study closer—it is Carl Greville, heir of Nelson Greville—"

"You lie!"

"Oh, no; I never tell lies. You did not kill him, either. The devil is against you; and so is Jose Moreno. Can you fight Jose Moreno and the devil? Ha!—take care! If you draw that pistol, I shall certainly shoot you!"

Just then came a cry from behind Jose—a yell, half-scream.

"Captain! captain!" shouted the voice. "Save me! Satan is at my heels! Help! or I shall be murdered!"

Jose knew it was Miguel. But he was not "green;" he did not turn to see the cause of the disturbance, though the appeal for aid and the pattering of feet told him that his follower was in difficulty.

And it was fortunate for him that he did not look around, for, in one second, Greville would have shot him.

"Captain, help!" shouted Miguel, again.

Then there was another cry from the lips of the Hunchback. He had recognized Jose. Both of his hated enemies were now before him; and the fury of a demon warmed his veins, as he dashed on, close upon Miguel.

The voice of Hercules proved too much for even the schooled nerves of Jose Moreno. He knew who it was; he was thrown off his guard; he wheeled to save himself from one whom he feared far more than Evard Greville.

Crack! went Greville's pistol.

Jose staggered to his knees, and ere he could recover himself little Carl was torn from his arms.

But he still held the revolver.

As Miguel came up, panting and snorting in terror, the wounded man raised his weapon and fired at the pursuing form.

Hercules reeled, for the ball grazed his temple, and stung like fire. Miguel, with unerring aim, sent the carpet-bag whizzing into the face of his foe.

The Hunchback fell, and over him tripped the small man, who sprawled full length. In a moment he was writhing under the grip of the dwarf, who, half-stunned, half-blind, supposed him to be one of the Spaniards; and the iron fingers closed in deadly hold around the throat of the struggling captive.

"Say! Say! Hold on!—no, I mean let go! Murder! You've made a mistake! Lord! you'll strang—urg—murder!" squealed the diminutive humanity, as he wriggled and squirmed like an eel on a hook.

"A curse upon you!" snarled the Hunchback, as he released the man, and tottered to his feet.

But, Jose and Miguel had disappeared—Greville and the boy had disappeared.

The break in the crowd now filled up; again the fugitives of the night were hurrying through the tunnel.

Hercules strode on to the west entrance, where he glanced on every side, in vain, for a sight of the two villains. Then he retraced his steps, angry and gloomy in his discomfiture.

A slim shadow, closely hugging the wall, watched him till he was lost to view, finally moving away in the direction of the west opening, tightly grasping a carpet-bag, and smiling with satisfaction.

Hercules suddenly remembered that he had left Mortimer Gascon in peril. The fire was marching northward; he saw that, with the heavy gale blowing, nothing could save that portion of the city which lay directly in front of the flames.

The high, roaring sheet of red, which was rapidly devouring block after block, was now eating into the fat heart of a proud city—plunging its brands of ruin and desolation on! on! with a sweeping ferocity no effort of man could resist.

The home of the negress was already enveloped.

He quickened his pace. But it was a useless walk; he was soon forced to pause.

The engines were driven from their posts; the heroic firemen, worn and desperate, were beaten back, as the seething vortex of destruction hurled itself upon their stands, seeming to swallow, in huge gulps, all that came in its way—bursting doors, shivering windows, toppling down noble edifices—nothing could endure, everything must perish.

And the Hunchback looked anxiously ahead, then around among the fleeing multitude, for a sign of the negress; for he knew she must be driven from her house, and an uneasiness for the safety of Mortimer Gascon possessed him.

CHAPTER XIII.

JOSE HAS AN OBJECT.

MIGUEL assisted his captain to rise, and, in the passage of a second was dragging him away. Jose breathed hard. He was, evidently, in great pain; yet, with the other's aid he managed to escape before the Hunchback discovered who it was he held in his savage grip.

"By the saints!" exclaimed Miguel, "that man has nearly killed you."

"Do you know him?"

"Know him! How should I?"

"Yet you have seen him often."

"No."

"Yes—in New Orleans."

"Ah—"

"It was Carl Grand."

"May he die by the rope! I'll have his blood for this, captain!"

"Faster, Miguel, that cursed dwarf may still be in pursuit of us."

"Eh?—ugh!" and Miguel glanced uneasily back to see if Hercules was after them, while a shiver passed over his bulky frame.

As they passed into, and turned northward along Morgan street, the bully asked:

"Where are you hit? As I live, my hand is red with blood! You are bleeding badly!"

"No matter—hasten."

"But you will die, captain! Cospita! if you die, I am ruined—I can do nothing without you!"

"Come on."

"But this wound?"

"I am stanching it with my handkerchief. Cease your bother."

Jose was ill-humored. Besides his pain from the wound, he was disappointed greatly at having lost the boy, Carl; and the two combined to force a vent of snappishness.

Miguel suddenly paused on the corner of Randolph street.

"Look, now," he cried. "there's a crazy woman. See! what a fright! A she-devil, with her head broken, as I live. Can we not pick her pockets?"

Jose looked and saw a female drawing near, swinging her arms, laughing, making faces at those who were hurrying past her.

She was not the only case of insanity on the streets of Chicago during that dreadful night; and while many gazed in silent awe upon the poor creature, some sickening at the ghastly sight she presented, none dreamed of the cause of her condition—none imagined how she received that fearful gash across the temple, where the plaster was nearly torn off, and clots of blood disfigured a face that once was beautiful as colored statuary.

The woman was Hermoine. She held a roll of MS in one hand, waving it over her head occasionally; alternately chattering in an incoherent manner, and roaming aimlessly along, seeming to enjoy the excitement around her, and glancing carelessly at the lurid heavens.

Jose Moreno knew her even in her horrible disguise. He was, for a moment, dumb in astonishment; then he grasped Miguel by the arm, and whispered, quickly:

"It is Hermoine Greville!"

"No!" returned Miguel, amazed at the announcement.

"I would know her in a worse guise than that."

"Devils! I know her, too, now."

Jose suddenly threw off the other's hold, and advanced toward her.

She saw him approaching and paused, contemplating him.

"Lady," he said.

"Lady?" she repeated. "Why, that isn't my name. Don't you know me. They call me Satanella."

"Satanella, then," acquiesced Jose. "Where are you going?"

"Going? How funny," musingly. "Do you know, I was on a mission of some kind—but I have forgotten. What will my father say? Ha! ha! ha! Well, I don't care." Then, abruptly, "Who are you?"

"I can tell you what your mission is," evaded Jose.

"Can you? How opportune! That's good—well, tell me."

"You are seeking some one."

"Am I? I don't know. Who is he? Is it a man?"

"Yes, a man. His name is Evard."

"Evard? Evard?" repeated the maniac, half-aloud. "I have heard that name somewhere. I guess you must be right. See here—I've a message for him." She held up the papers.

"Would you go to him?" Jose inquired, gently.

"Yes; let us find him. You will show me the way?"

"I will. Come—take my arm."

"Your arm? Oh, yes! Ha! ha! ha! I didn't think. Come ahead, now."

She slid her arm in his, and he led her slowly away.

Hermoine became silent as they moved along, looking down at her feet, and unconscious of the steadfast gaze which Jose was fixing on her bowed head—a gaze that, at times, wandered to the papers she held, as though the Spaniard longed to possess himself of them.

And in his mind he was saying:

"If you knew what the documents contained, Delia Rivers, you would eat them sooner than carry them about. And I must have them at all hazards!"

For he had recognized the black ribbon, and black seal, and knew well the contents of the MS.

Miguel, who had been attentively watching the movements of his captain, stood staring vacantly after the couple.

"Now, may his infernal majesty make a desert of my carcass! If that is Hermoine Greville, she is crazy! What does the captain want with Hermoine Greville? Where would he take her? Cospita!—is he crazy?"

He followed after them, wondering afresh with every step.

Jose led his companion a long walk. When he paused, it was before a two-story house of neat appearance.

A woman was standing in the doorway, looking up at the fire-lit sky. As we come closer, we see that she is an Indian crone, of withered form and time-worn countenance.

Her piercing eyes bent upon the comers, and she was about to speak; but Jose made a sign, which she understood, for she stepped aside and allowed them to pass.

"Who is that queer woman?" asked Hermoine, as they entered.

"A friend to both of us," answered Jose.

"Go on, my Satanella; we will soon find him whom you seek."

"What's this?" hissed the crone, in his ear, while Hermoine was advancing, and casting curious glances about her.

"The woman who calls herself Hermoine Greville," he replied, in a quick, low tone. "Give me the best room in your house—the safest for a prison. Henry and I will pay you roundly."

"I can't give you the best. Trix lies in the best, half-burned to death, and with a head of bruises."

"Ha! how happened it? what has the boy been at?"

"He tried to avenge his mother, and failed—but, see, the woman is watching us. Follow me."

"Come, Satanella," Jose said, turning to Hermoine, "this way, and we'll soon find your lover."

"Lover? I have no lover—stop!—yes I have—one. But he went out a little while ago. I must hasten home again. He is back by this time—"

"No; come this way."

"I can't, I tell you. I must go home to meet my lover. Show me out."

He seized her by the arm as she took a step toward the door.

"But you must!"

"Who says 'must' to me?" demanded the maniac. "Let go."

"Come, come; you can go in a few moments. I won't keep you."

"Sure?" hesitatingly.

"Yes."

"Well, I'll trust you. I must make haste with my errand, though. I wonder what I am to do when I see him?"

They were ascending the stairs behind the Indian crone.

"You go first," Hermoine paused short as she spoke.

Jose did as she wished; but he was watching her closely.

As they passed around the landing on the stairway, a black slouch hat appeared at the parlor door. The hat was followed by a bearded face, and two bleary eyes gazed after the trio.

It was Miguel.

When the front door was banged in the Spaniard's face, he immediately sought the parlor window, and, with the systematic celerity of a burglar—as he was—here gained ingress to the house, determined not to lose sight of his captain.

And there was another form, small, elastic, shadowy, that dodged hither and thither close behind Miguel.

CHAPTER XIV.

JACK WILLIS SAYS "HALT!"

It was a pale, haggard face that looked in upon Zone from the green bough, where the small circle of light from the lamp fell in a weird halo.

As she uttered the surprised exclamation, the face vanished, and its owner slid quickly to the ground—scaling the garden wall, and disappearing in the gloom.

Zone roused herself. Her first action was to seize the lamp and start in pursuit of Hermoine, grasping the poniard, and determined to get back the papers, of which she had been robbed.

But she was foiled. While searching for the maniac—rushing through nearly every room in the large house, the object of her search glided out into the street and fled from the scene.

"Delia Rivers!" she cried, madly, "bring back those papers."

But she called in vain.

Then, disappointed, chagrined, angered beyond all control, she returned to the parlor, and broke forth, hissing, as she paced to and fro:

"Gone!—lost! And I had it in my hand! Have I forgotten how to use my poniard? Have I become a mere child, that I should be thwarted so easily? 'Sdeath! If I but had her here now, I'd—" completing the sentence with a stamp of her foot, a gritting of the pearly teeth, and clenching her fist till the flesh nigh bled beneath the nails.

Quicker grew the steps across the carpet; more excited heaved her bosom, as it told of the mastering emotions within her.

Then she paused.

"It will never do for me to remain here! I have not time to restore things to rights in the library—and Carl Grand may be here at any moment. O-h! to think that I should have the prize snatched from my very hand!"

In coming to the house of Evard Greville, she had turned her cape—which was black on the wrong side—and wrapped it about her head, thus concealing the fact that she wore a mask. Going to the door, she paused to draw the cape closely over her, and then sped away, going westward.

As she went, she was uttering to herself:

"I have seen Evard Greville—the true Evard Greville! Or have my eyes deceived me? No, no; I am too wide awake in my anger! But I'll be even with you yet, Delia Rivers!"

The owner of the face which had appeared at the library window of Evard Greville's house continued on, after making his exit from the garden, until he reached a saloon in a retired section, whose exterior was dim, dirty, desolate-looking.

Our character entered by a side-door, to a room where several chairs and tables, and a rickety counter, constituted the make-up of a card-crib, with poor-stocked bar, and dingy atmosphere.

The chairs were deserted; all who had been there—comprising roughs and liquor-swillers—

having turned out, during the earlier part of the great fire, for questionable purposes.

But the keeper of the saloon was on hand; more careful of his business than to desert it on this, his favorite night.

By the aid of a sputtering lamp, we see that the solitary comer is clad in threadbare cloth, with bursted shoes and torn hat. Yet beneath that hat—which he pushed back as he advanced to the counter—there was a pale, handsome face, with high, broad brow, piercing eyes, and lips of firm compression.

He called for a drink; and while the man was setting out the liquor, he looked down, long and hard, at the ragged note he was about to spend.

"My last cent!" he uttered, slowly. "The last I own in the world; while there are others who drink from golden goblets, and spend their cash freely—my cash! But it won't be for long; no—ha! ha!—well, I'll soon spoil their enjoyment, that's all."

Paying for his drink, he retired gloomily to a seat.

"It is time Jack Willis was here," glancing at a clock, which ticked, with a dismal voice, against a besmeared wall. "He said he would follow immediately, and meet me here to-night. Ah! he is a shrewd fellow, Jack is. How fortunate that I happened across him! But what can detain him?"—with another impatient glance at the clock.

Now, the diminutive man with the carpet-bag was the identical Jack Willis referred to by the gloomy young man who sat in the out-of-the-way saloon.

Jack Willis was a detective—a Chicagoan by birth; a sharp, active member of the S. S., with a reputation of worth well merited by his admirable abilities.

A few years prior to this eventful night, he had removed to reside in New Orleans; and now he was back in his native city—on "business," as we may easily judge.

Let us follow him.

He hurried westward from the tunnel, congratulating himself on his release from the vice-like fingers of the Hunchback, clutching the carpet-bag tightly, and bent on keeping his appointment with the lone occupant of the distant saloon.

He had not gone far before he stopped short, and caught his breath. Directly ahead of him were Jose and Miguel.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "there's Miguel again—rascal! Look—the other fellow is wounded. He staggers. Heard a pistol go off—very dangerous weapon. See 'em—now, Jack Willis, you want friend Miguel. Got a warrant for his arrest. So Evard Greville must wait—he's done worse waiting before, and I guess a little longer won't hurt him."

He followed the pair.

When they stopped upon meeting Hermoine, the detective halted also, with eyes widened and mouth puckered.

He, too, recognized Hermoine—knowing her well, as the reader will learn anon.

As Jose led the maniac away, and Miguel followed after, Jack Willis dogged the trio—intent though circumspect.

He saw the two enter the house; he saw Miguel climb in at the parlor window; then, adjusting the carpet-bag, he drew a pistol from his breast, took the weapon between his teeth, and muttered:

"Now it's my turn. Look out, friend Miguel, I'm on your heels!"

He raised himself to a level with the sill, and gazed in.

Miguel was looking out into the entry.

The detective swung one leg over, and gained a sitting posture.

Just then the Spaniard heard his captain and the crone returning. Not caring to be caught acting the part of a spy, he started for the window.

Jack leveled his pistol.

"Halt!" he squeaked just above a whisper.

Miguel stared; then, with a self-suppressed oath, he ran to an alcove, where he secreted himself; for not a moment was to spare—Jose was close to the door.

The detective sprang nimbly into the room, and whisked himself out of sight behind one of the window-curtains.

He saw that Miguel was as anxious as he to remain unseen, and, feeling safe on that score, he determined not to retreat.

In another second, Jose and the crone entered.

"Strange," said the first, pausing in the doorway, and glancing along the hall; "what can she have done with them, I wonder?"

CHAPTER XV.

THE NEGRESS ON THE TRAIL.

As Hercules dashed out of the basement room, in pursuit of Miguel, Mortimer Gascon—who was supporting himself by a chair—suddenly felt a dizziness come over him, and he swayed unsteadily.

The negress sprang to his assistance.

"Bear up, man! steady!" she cried.

"Water! Give me some water!" gasped the invalid.

She hurriedly furnished him what he desired, and the draught revived him.

"Who are you?" demanded Lu; but she added, in the same breath: "Oh! it is Mortimer Gascon! Why did Hurl bring you here?"

"Yes, it is Mortimer Gascon. And you—you are Lu?"

"You know me, eh? Well, you ought; the uncle of David Greville ought to know old Lu well enough."

At that instant, some one kicked in the basement window, shivering frame and glass, and a strained voice bellowed:

"Ho, there! if you don't want to be roasted, you'll get out of this! Fly! for your lives, fly!"

"The fire is on us!" exclaimed Lu, as she ran to the window and looked out. "Come, we must fly!"

"I cannot. I am too weak. See—I can scarcely stand."

"And I am weak from this cut on my neck—'sdeath!" beginning to tie up the wound inflicted by Jose.

They could hear the crackling, explosive sound of the rapidly devouring fire. The room was lighted by the blaze without, and the shouts and cries that rent the air, grew hoarser, more excited as they mingled with the ominous murmur of the night.

Then the negress took him in her brawny arms, and made her way to the street. As they issued forth, the gale threw a cloud of smoky sparks over and around them, and, for a second, brought them to a halt.

A man with a push cart was coming along, on a wild run, with terror depicted in every outline of his features.

The negress hailed him.

"Stop! Stop, there! Lend us a hand, if there's a heart in your breast!"

"How much will you give?" yelled the man, half-pausing.

"Fifty dollars. I have no more."

"Twon't do. Make it a hundred, and—"

He never completed the sentence.

A heavy engine came thundering down upon him—driven from its post by the awful heat of the ravaging flames. The horses were mad with fright, and the excited driver, with teeth clenched, and eyes starting, tried, in vain, to turn them aside.

The beasts were heedless of the straining reins though their mouths foamed and bled beneath the savage tension of the bit, they plunged on, at a headlong speed, scattering every thing before them.

"Take c-a-r-e!" shrieked the driver.

Too late. The unfortunate man was spinning to one side, knocked senseless, perhaps killed outright.

It was no time to hesitate. The negress seized the cart, and, placing Mortimer Gascon in it, pushed ahead; while she glanced back, at times, upon the great maelstrom of fire which was engulfing the city.

She was soon out of danger from the dread element. But a new peril threatened; she had lost considerable blood, and began to feel a sleepy exhaustion. To sink down now, was to court death, either by being trampled on, or perishing when the flames, at last, rushed upon the spot.

Hers was a strong nature, however, and with that nature she fought the treacherous weakness off.

After traversing a number of blocks—anon speaking encouragingly to her charge, who was in an extremely nervous condition, Lu called to a boy who was tearing past them.

"Here!" she cried, "push this cart for me, and I'll pay you five dollars."

Even this urchin was keenly alert for business contracts, for he demurred:

"Five dollars? That ain't enough. Gi' me ten."

"Ten, then. Take hold, quickly."

"Gi' me the money first."

When he had received the price of his services in advance, the boy grasped the cross-piece of the cart and started off briskly. Lu following close behind him.

Suddenly, she stood still, and glanced at a two-story house on her left.

There was a man in the doorway—just in his rear, the bent form of an old woman; and the first one was calling out:

"Ho, Miguel! where are you? Come here."

The eyes of the negress glowed like living coals.

"It is Jose Moreno!" she muttered, breathing hard, while her veins warmed. "He must have given Hurl the slip. And he has the boy. Little Carl is in that house. I must get him back again."

But she remembered that she was not alone. She wheeled about to stay the boy who was in her employ. He was gone.

While she was gazing anxiously around her, the door of the house banged shut.

"I have lost him. Curse that boy! why didn't he halt when I did? But I can't find Mortimer Gascon now; no use in hunting. He is gone for to-night, anyhow. May the Lord look after him!"

As she concluded, she advanced to the narrow

alley at the side of the house, bent on recovering the lost child.

The gate was open, and she entered. A low, threatening snarl greeted her; a large dog made toward her.

The cellar entrance was at her side. To escape the hungry teeth of the brute, she fled down this, closing the door after her—the fierce jaws coming together with a loud snap, as the animal tried to bite her disappearing hand.

The boy who was pushing Mortimer Gascon before him in the cart, had seen the negress pause, but thought she would soon overtake him.

Not until he had turned several corners, did he realize that she was no longer with him.

He could not go back—or would not, though Gascon strove to bribe him with a liberal offer.

Then, becoming involved with the crowd on Randolph street, a fear for his personal safety took possession of him, and he fled, leaving the helpless invalid directly in front of a lumber-wagon.

"Git out of that, or I'll mash you!" screeched the man in the wagon, as he craned his neck over a bundle of dry-goods.

Gascon threw up his arms imploringly, and cried, in faint tones:

"I cannot; I'm sick and exhausted! Turn aside!"

"Nary a turn!" with a jerk of the reins. "Gee up, heyr! If you don't git, I'll run you down, by gum!"

A lithe figure rushed forward when the hooked wagon-tongue was almost crashing into the frail conveyance, and a pair of red-gloved hands drew him out of danger.

"This is fortunate, Mortimer Gascon. I was just in time!"

It was Zone. She started ahead with the current of men, horses, vehicles; while he thanked her from his heart for her providential coming.

"Stop! Stop!" cried a voice in the rear. "Zone! Mortimer Gascon! Hold, there, I say!"

She paused. In another moment Hercules, the Hunchback, was with them; and his first words were:

"God be praised! I feared the worst had befallen you, Mortimer Gascon. But where is Lu? Speak—where is she?"

CHAPTER XVI.

"ARE YOU AFRAID TO DIE?"

THE crone, the Spaniard and the maniac entered a comfortable apartment in the second story of the house, and Jose's teeth glistened behind his half-parted lips, as he turned to the prisoner with:

"Here we are, my Satanella."

"All right," she replied, carelessly, as she advanced, looking about her.

"It is here you will see your lover."

"All right," again.

But she perceived that they were the sole occupants of the room; and a feeling of distrust immediately preyed upon her, for she wheeled abruptly, and said:

"I don't see him. There is no one here. You have deceived me."

"Oh, no; rest easy. He will come soon enough—Lala!" the last to the Indian woman.

Their glances met; with quick, noiseless steps, they glided out, while Hermoine was gazing at a picture on the wall.

They locked the door upon their captive, and descended the stairs.

"The window," interrogated Jose; "is it safe?"

"Safe enough—nailed till it is half iron."

"Did you see the papers she carried?"

"Yes. When she came in she had them; when we left her, they were gone."

"Ha! yes; I remember: as we went out of the room, I missed them. They are in her bosom, perhaps. I must have those papers, Lala."

"They are not in her bosom, nor on her person at all," croaked the woman.

"How do you know that?" anxiously.

"No matter; but I'll swear it."

"Strange; what can she have done with them, I wonder?" this as they entered the parlor.

"Eaten them, no doubt—"

"Stay!" he interrupted. "My man, Miguel, is outside. The fellow is cursing me roundly by this time. Let me call him."

He passed out to the front door, and called Miguel by name—in vain, of course. The Indian woman still kept close behind him.

The pair had no sooner left the doorway than Miguel, determined to make his presence known, came from behind the curtains of the alcove.

But he halted suddenly. Jack Willis confronted him, with revolver at a level; and the detective's eye danced threateningly as he hissed:

"Right about, friend Miguel—jump! Go hide yourself again. Mind!—I'm a gunpowder almanac, and I'll put cold weather into your life quicker than frost! Hear me?—right about!"

Miguel looked at the dark muzzle of the wea-

pon, surveyed the diminutive humanity in his path, then, grinding an imprecation between his tobacco-stained teeth, he slunk back to his concealment.

Jose and the crone returned after a few moments.

"What's all that blood?" demanded she, now seeming to notice, for the first, the Spaniard's condition.

"A bullet from the pistol of an enemy," explained Jose. "Curse him!—he was quick on the trigger, and treacherous as he was quick. Here—look."

When he had bared his breast, she examined the torn flesh, frowning as she bent her glittering eyes upon the wound.

"Bad—bad—bad," she uttered, slowly, as the blood began to flow afresh.

"How! you don't mean that I am in danger?" and a shivering sensation crept over him.

"Yes."

"No—"

"But I say yes. Do you know more than I, when medicine has been my study, and the healing of flesh my practice? You must go to bed—"

"Impossible—"

"And remain quiet," continued the woman, without noticing his interruption, and proceeding to bathe the wound with water from a pitcher on a near table.

"Do you think I will die, Lala?" stammered Jose.

"Maybe not. Come—to bed. The sooner, the better; and I'll dress it for you."

"To bed? No! I can not. Lala, I am playing a game, in which human wits are the cards. To lose time, now, would be to defeat myself."

"Hark!" broke in the crone, bending to a listening attitude.

The savage snarl of a dog was what called forth her exclamation.

"It is your pet," said Jose.

"And when he growls, there is cause for it," whispered she.

"Pah! no matter. Perhaps some one, racing through the alley, has angered him. This wound—I must not go to bed, Lala; I have too much work to do. Is there nothing to heal it at once—for a time—afterward, I can lie upon my back for a year, if need be."

The Indian woman studied him keenly, and, for a long while, was silent.

"Are you afraid to die?" she asked, at length.

"Die!" Jose started. "What mean you?"

"This: I can cure you for twenty-four hours—make you strong as ever. But, when that twenty-fourth hour rolls around," dwelling strangely on the last, "it may be that all the arts old Lala knows will not save you! Worse flame will be in the hurt; there will be great danger. Will you try it?"

Jose Moreno was very pale as he weighed the words of the Indian woman. Was he brave enough to test the ordeal? could he accomplish in twenty-four hours the purposes he had in view? and if accomplished, what were his chances of deriving benefit from the labor of his plans?

"Cure me at once!" he exclaimed, after a moment's thought. "You'll find me brave enough. And if I die, what matter after all?—for if I am unsuccessful, I do not care to live!"

Simultaneous with the utterance of this resolution, there was a low groan in the direction of the alcove.

Miguel—ruffian as he was—idolized Jose Moreno, his captain. When he heard the reckless declaration, he felt miserable, and all the caution he could muster would not check the groan which rose to his lips; yet, while his feelings were sincere, he cursed himself for his weakness.

In a second's flight, Jose sprang forward and tore the curtains aside.

He grasped his follower by the throat, and dragged him to his knees ere he discovered who the eavesdropper was.

"Scoundrel!" he cried.

"Hold, captain!—I don't quarrel with you," spouted the bully.

"Miguel!"—in astonishment, "you here! How is this?"

"The devil!" snorted Miguel, rising to his feet, and shaking himself. "I am cramped to death, then broken to pieces! Would you tear my head off with that grip of yours?"

"How came you here?" questioned his captain.

"I'll answer that another time. Look, now: there's another spy in this room."

"What mean you?"

And Jack Willis set his teeth hard, and muttered, inwardly:

"The cat's out, and I'm in! Here's a mess! Coffee!"

"There!" growled Miguel, pointing to the window curtains.

Jose understood, for he turned around and stepped toward the place indicated. Bang! went the ambushed revolver.

The Spaniard reeled backward, his face burnt by the explosion, but not seriously hurt.

Miguel vented an angry oath. He drew a pistol, and fired at that portion of the curtain whence had come the shot at his captain.

But Willis emerged from the other side, un-

harmed. Like a rocket, he darted out, uttering a defiant yell, and discharging another barrel at the bulky Spaniard, who was rushing upon him.

The bullet whistled spitefully close to Miguel's ear; and then he paused short, and stared—upon a square opening in the floor, down which the detective had vanished.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SUMMONS THAT STAYED A CRIME.

WHEN Evard Greville snatched the boy from Jose's arms, after wounding the latter, in the tunnel, he fled with all possible speed from the scene of the encounter.

And as he went, casting uneasy glances behind him, a devilish expression settled in his face.

Jose Moreno had said that this child was the last survivor of the family of Nelson Greville, and heir by law. It will be remembered that, in a former chapter, Jose charged Evard Greville with the murder of Nelson Greville and his family, for two objects: first, in keeping with the mysterious pledge of the bullet-scar; second, that he and Hermoine might gain possession of the moneys and estates coming to them in case of the decease of Mortimer Gascon, who was the only remaining member—known—at the beginning of our narrative, to interfere with their inheritance.

Now, as he hurried on, clenching the child in a fierce hold, and silencing it by horrible threats, he realized that his foul work in the past had not been thoroughly done; for here was an object, sprung up unexpectedly in his way, which might ruin him, and eventually drag his crime-stained soul into the black pit of retributive justice.

He was a man bold as he was hardened. It was not, then, a look of fear which overspread his features, at the uprise of so dreaded an obstacle; but, rather one expressing a determination to defy the fate which threatened to shake his security.

He could hear the thunderous crash of falling buildings, the hoarse roar of spouting flames, crackling of timbers, shrieks of whistles, clang of bells, and cries of affrighted people in his rear; the howling gale swept about him, and (long since bare-headed) fanned the hair back from his white, cold forehead.

All around was lighted up, as if it were sunrise in a realm of vortexed nature, where the laws of earth convulsed beneath the onset of a myriad of demons, let loose from their chained fury, to engulf mankind in misery.

Alison has awed us with his description of the burning of Moscow—where, as in the fearful fall of Chicago, the sweep of an autumn gale made hideous the progress of the wrathful element—the explosion of oils and gases, soaring balloons of flame, burning towers, flying brands, raining sparks, hillocks of smoke, all vomiting, spitting, roaring, hissing, seething, crashing in the vast, hell-like sea of fire; and two centuries ago, the dark angel laid a great Metropolis, beyond the Atlantic, wide and waste in ashes—more merciless than the havoc of a barbarous army, deadlier than the wave of the rushing whirlwind.

But here, quick as the destruction of Djerash, in Arabian tradition, it would seem that a whole population were doomed to death in a single night, so rapid, so overwhelming was the on-sweep of the irresistible fiend—catching, coiling round, devouring, overthrowing thick walls, massive structures, melting iron and stone, and blackening, in shapeless heaps, all that was grand and beautiful in architecture.

Yet, amid this frightful turmoil, amid the consuming excitement that wrung the breast of every human, and made dumb beasts shrink in horror before the advancing doom; when a noble city was going down under that fiery sickle like ripe wheat at a cradler's front, Edward Greville heeded not his surrounding; he was calm by force of will, and thought upon nothing save the child he carried—small, weak frame, and yet an object of fear and hatred!

On he went; then, when at a safe distance, he relaxed his pace to a hurried stride that took him in the direction of Union Park.

Zone was forgotten; Jose Moreno, Hercules, Hermoine, all were struck from his thoughts in the sole occupation of mind with this child.

When he reached his house, Zone had long since gone; all was still within.

Then, for the moment, little Carl forgot the threats of his captor and cried:

"Where's aunty Lu? Where is she? I want aunty Lu!"

"Be still, you brat!" hissed Greville, shaking the puny form roughly.

But this treatment only increased the child's terror, and it began to scream:

"I want aunty Lu! I want aunty Lu!" while the tears rolled hot and fast down its soft cheeks.

Even the immature susceptibilities were awakened by Greville's harsh tone and glowering look; a keen perception was roused in the young heart; a feeling, as it were, that told the senses of a pending something to be dreaded.

He went straightway to his library, and banged the door shut.

Lighting a lamp, and turning round, the first thing his eyes rested upon was the heap of disarranged papers on the floor. Involuntarily he glanced up at the desk, and so saw that some one had been busy there during his absence.

One of his hands was placed firmly over the boy's mouth, to prevent outcry—the other held the captive to his breast; and he nearly dropped both these holds in the suddenness, if not the significance of the sight, for in that desk were many papers he durst not let the world look upon.

But he did not pause to ask himself who had done this. He had sought the library for a purpose; that purpose—diabolical as it was fearless—soon became apparent.

At one side was a lounge. On the lounge was a pillow; and Evard Greville released the boy's mouth to take this pillow up.

His eyes were lowering, his brow frowning, his teeth clenched sternly, his whole mien Satanic, for there was a murderous object stamped plainly in every lineament.

And from between the locked jaws came a soulless voice:

"Let us see now, Carl Greville, whether I fail in putting you from my path! I'll send you to that father and mother who were the destruction of my father's family—send you as another evidence that I have not forgotten the pledge of the bullet-scar, given at the bedside of a dying mother! Ha! ha! ha!" It was a half-crazy laugh that issued from his bloodless lips, as he endeavored to force the child down upon the lounge.

Carl read the closing doom. He saw that this man was seeking his life, and his faint voice rose in a piteous pleading as the strong foe gradually overcame him.

"Don't kill me!" he shrieked. "Don't!—oh, don't."

In vain the appeal. Backward, slowly backward, pinioning arms and limbs, the villain weighed him till he could place a knee on his breast; and then the pillow was clapped over the pale, beseeching face by a remorseless hand.

One more wild, useless appeal—a wail of despair that floated out through the open window on a responseless air, and then came a gurgling, choking sound that told of suffocation, while the suffering form writhed in its struggle against fast-gripping death.

But the murderer paused in his hellish work. The cold sweat that beaded his brow began to trickle like streams of ice over his clammy skin, for there was an interruption to the foul scene of his creation.

"Rap! rap! rap! rap! rap!" reverberated through the lower hall, an imperative summons at the front door.

He started with a guilty tremor, and glanced toward the door of the library, as if expecting the headlong attack of an enemy—and he was prepared; for his revolver leaped from its pocket, and, with finger on the trigger, he waited.

His appearance, as he retained the fatal pillow in its place, and leveled the weapon with his disengaged hand, was wild, defiant, unearthly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE ROOM OF MEDICINES.

THE sudden vanishment of the detective was as unexpected as it was complete: and Miguel's mouth yawned, as he halted on the very edge of the hole, and gazed down into the darkness.

"The devil!" he enunciated, in a startled way, as he nearly lost his equilibrium, and came nigh going over himself.

"What's this?" exclaimed Jose, turning to the crone for an explanation.

The speaker's face was burnt, blackened and comical, and Miguel laughed gutturally at his captain's appearance, even while he felt sorry.

"It's a hole over the cellar," answered she. "I found it when we moved here, and closed it the best I could. But it was not strong enough, after all—"

"Then the spy will escape us!" interrupted Jose, making a movement toward the entry, intending to intercept Willis, who, he thought, must emerge from the door in the yard.

But the woman detained him.

"Stay—no danger; he is a fast prisoner. Besides, Pet will tear you to pieces, if you go out there. Quiet yourself."

"But how is he a prisoner?" the Spaniard asked. "Can he not get out at the rear?"

"No—"

"Why?"

"The cellar is bricked across, midway. Trix and I fixed it. And could he pass Pet? Ha! ha! ha! why, the dog would rend him in shreds! I had meant to make the thing a trap, and now it is used easily."

"Captain!—he has broken his head! Hear that," spoke Miguel.

A series of painful groans came up from the dark cavity, and they listened.

"If the fall has killed him, so much the better. We shall not be troubled with him," said the woman.

"Wrong for you!" snapped Miguel; "his carcass will rot and smell—then who will bury him? I am no gravedigger."

"Hist!" They listened more intently.

There was another sound—a cracking, crashing, rattling noise.

The Indian woman seized the lamp from the table, and, by aid of a string which Miguel produced, lowered the light into the hole. All were wondering.

"As I live, he is breaking his own bones!" whispered the bully.

The rays showed them a square, damp, gloomy, tomb-like place, devoid of outlet. Against one side stood two candle-boxes, end on end, which the crone had cast down there the day previous; but, with this exception, the prison-cellar was bare.

Jack Willis had vanished again.

The lamp was hurriedly drawn up, and the trio looked at one another blankly.

"Where can he be?" cried Jose, more to himself.

"In one of the boxes," ventured Miguel.

"Bah! a man in a candle-box? You're a fool!"

The woman said nothing. She was superstitious by nature, and the disappearance of the man who, she knew, could not escape from the cellar in so short a time by ordinary means, led her to believe the occurrence wrought by spiritual agency.

She motioned them to assist her in re-adjusting the trap, and the two men were as silent as she, in actual amazement, while they lent a hand.

Suddenly Jose Moreno felt a dizziness in the head, and staggered, clutching spasmodically at the thin air. He would have fallen but for the timely support of his follower.

"Ha!" cried the woman, recalled to a sense of his condition, "he is weak; steady him. Bring him along up-stairs. Quickly, now."

Miguel bore his captain from the parlor to a bed in the second story; and, for the time, Jack Willis was forgotten.

"Grandmother, is that you?" inquired a low voice from the adjoining room.

"Yes, it is I," she replied, going to a door between. "Quiet yourself. How do you feel now, boy?"

"Better."

"Who is it?" asked Jose, half rising to his elbow on the bed.

"Trix."

"Ah! he had slipped my memory. You said he was hurt in trying to avenge his mother?"

"There, there—you talk too much. Peace."

"Doctor him fast, old woman, or there will be a funeral, as I live!" put in Miguel, growling, for he saw that Jose was about to faint.

She applied restoratives; and when the wounded man was somewhat strengthened, she left him with his follower, and retired to a sort of closet near the foot of the couch.

A fluid lamp was ignited beneath a rusty pan, and a number of liquids she poured in soon began to steam. Then, when the mixture reached a boil, she took various herbs from their hooks on the side-shelving, and added these to the decoction.

With a monstrous ladle she stirred the mass around, humming to herself a low, weird strain that was like the murmur of a queer stringed instrument.

Jose could see everything that passed, and he lay there watching her intently.

Miguel cast suspicious glances at the pan, and scowled in silence. He detested medicine, and its manufacture in this instance seemed to him like the creation of poison.

While working steadily away, the Indian doctress was called by the occupant of the next room.

"Grandmother—the cordial. I am weakening."

"Stir this," said she to Miguel, indicating the bubbling, pasty liquid.

Only the emergency of the case overcame his repugnance for the task; and even then it was not without much hesitation that he advanced and did as she requested.

"The curst thing will shoot off, and I shall be killed!" he muttered, using the ladle with extreme caution, and on the alert to jump at the least sign of combustion. "It is the wine of the devil, and the captain's soul is lost when he drinks it!—h-a!" a slight spatter in the steaming mass made his nerves twitch, and he stood off at arm's length, continuing to mutter uneasily.

"Trix?" called Jose, inquiringly.

"I am here—and near dead for what I have done. That is you, Captain Moreno?"

"Yes; and I am half killed myself. What ails you, boy?"

"Aiming at the life of him who sent my mother to her grave, I not only failed, but fared badly for my pains."

"How happened it?"

"Peace!" interposed the woman. "Neither of you have strength to spare in talking. Be still, I say."

But Trix explained. He told how he had assaulted the Hunchback on the roof, amid the glare and smoke and heat of the raging fire; he minutely detailed all that transpired, even to his own miraculous escape from the burning building, and concluded by expressing a belief that Hercules had perished in the flames.

"Not so," said Jose, at the last. "Hercules

is still alive, for we have seen him within the hour gone."

"We have!" indorsed Miguel, with a grunt, as he thought of his narrow escape from the dreaded enemy.

But, unseen by Jose or Miguel, there was a strange scene enacting in the room where lay the suffering Indian boy.

The crone had grasped him by the arm, half-jerking him to a sitting posture, and her small, dark orbs were snapping in excitement, as she cried:

"What?—what's that you say? Hercules hung by one hand from the roof, and the weight of Zone upon him—both in mid-air—death for each in the fall?"

"It was so. But I cared not; I sought vengeance, and though a hundred perished with him, it was the same to me so long as he died!"

"Boy, you are mad!"

"No, I am not—"

"But I say you are!—you are mad! Zone is your own sister!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A FOE ON THE DOOR-STEP.

THE appearance of Hercules on the scene of confusion, when through a miraculous Providence—which guided Zone thither—Mortimer Gascon escaped injury, perhaps death, was a source of courage to the invalid, and a fortunate occurrence for the frail girl, who was seeking to extricate herself, with the cumbersome pushcart, from the jostling, frantic crowd.

"God be thanked!" uttered Gascon; and an exclamation of like fervency fell from Zone's lips.

"Where is Lu?" repeated the Hunchback, as they were compelled onward in the shouting, hallooing, surging mass.

"I have not seen her to-night," Zone answered.

"She was with me only a short while ago," said Gascon, faintly; "and employed a boy to push this cart along. But, we got separated, and the boy deserted me. She was hurt, I think."

"Hurt?"

"Yes. I saw blood upon her neck."

"Ha!—say you so?" Hercules thought of what the negress had told him—the recent appearance of Jose and Miguel at her home, and the theft of the child; and as he at once suspected them to be the authors of her hurt—he inwardly vowed a double vengeance on the two Spaniards.

"Here—this way. Follow me," he commanded Zone, as he whirled the cart into a side street, and hastened northward, where there was less to obstruct his progress.

"He has fainted!" whispered Zone, presently.

And it was so. Mortimer Gascon's weak condition was a prey, at last, to the excitement which had threatened to rob him of his senses every moment since the terrible ordeal in the burning house, and he lay insensible in the bottom of the conveyance.

"This will not do! He must be revived. Ho, there! woman, a cup of water, quick, to save a life!" pausing near a doorway, where several females were huddled together.

One of these disappeared, and returned shortly, with the cool liquid.

Hercules bathed the brow and wrists of the unconscious man; and Gascon soon opened his eyes to life again.

"Bear up," said the Hunchback.

"Did I faint?" asked the invalid, bewilderedly.

"Yes. But you must keep your strength now; there is danger everywhere about us, and it is no time for faints. Well, what now, boy?—where's your tongue? Have you aught to say?—then speak it."

A panting, gaping, dirty-faced urchin had run up to him, and was now trying to catch breath enough to say something. It was the boy who had been employed by the negress to wheel Mortimer Gascon away from a dangerous vicinity.

"Say!" he blurted, "why, I'm sorry I left that 'ere mister by himself, an' I've come to see 'f I can't 'pologize for 't. I was close by you all, when I heerd you askin' the girl there where 'Lu' was, an' I s'pose Lu 's the one 'at paid me to help 'er. I don't know where she is; but I can show you where it was about 'at I lost 'er, if you want me to."

Hercules interrupted him by turning quickly to the woman who had furnished the cup of water.

"Have you room for a man and girl in your house?—and I will pay you for it. Let them stay with you till I come back. It may not be for long."

She consented. The Hunchback bore Mortimer Gascon in, and laid him on a lounge.

"Poor man! was he hurt by a fall?" asked one of the women.

"See—he's been burnt, too!" exclaimed another.

"How did it happen?" questioned the third of the trio.

But Hercules paid them no heed. Leaving

Zone to care for their charge, he slipped a note into the boy's hand and bade him lead on.

They hurried off, back over the course they had come by—with the exception that, instead of trying to force their way against the pouring current of humans on Randolph street, they pursued a roundabout way.

Soon they were on the spot where the boy had seen Lulu halt and gaze at the man in the doorway.

"Here's the place, mister," said the boy, halting, and explaining what he had seen.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I am. Now, I can't do no more," and with this the ragged lad darted off out of sight, adding, to himself: "My, what an ugly feller!"

Hercules glanced up at the silent, spectral-shadowed house before which he stood. The locality was rather a deserted one; and in the demi-solitude—where the murmuring din of the night sounded strangely in his ears—he paused to wonder if Lu was in that house, what had brought her there, and what he should do.

"We must not be separated," he resolved; "and if she is here, I will bring her out."

He advanced boldly, and pulled the bell. As he did so, he heard a disturbance at the rear of the house—a pistol-shot, the fierce snarling and snapping of a dog, accompanied by a cry from human lips.

A hard struggle of some kind was going on.

His first impulse was to hasten around to the rear, to ascertain what was transpiring, what those sounds of conflict meant; but, while standing irresolute, a window in the second story was thrown open, and a head thrust out.

"Who's there?" demanded a blunt voice.

The tone was snappish, the speaker ill-humored.

"One who would enter," replied the Hunchback, equally as sharp.

"And what do you want, eh?"

"Admittance."

"Begone, whoever you are; I am busy."

"I will see the inside of this house. So, open the door, or it goes down," growled back Hercules, who saw that he was dealing with a spit-fire.

The noise of combat at the rear was still kept up; only, the dog was now howling between snarls, as if it was getting worsted by an antagonist.

The head at the window disappeared, and the sash fell with a whack that shivered some of its glass.

"Something is wrong," he muttered; "else what means that racket? Ho, there! open the door, I say," and he thumped impatiently on the panel.

Pretty soon a pair of clumsy feet came shuffling over the entry oilcloth, and, in another moment, the door swung back on its hinges.

"Who and what are you, that you dare to threaten the house of a peaceable female?" cried the Indian woman, harshly, as Hercules placed one foot on the sill, and started to enter.

But he paused. Just then a faint, boyish voice uttered a cry behind him—a wild appeal, such as one will send up when in peril from a dreaded source.

CHAPTER XX.

STIMULATING PROSPECTS.

WE have said that Jack Willis was a small man. That the reader may form some positive idea of his diminutive anatomy, let us look after him, and explain his disappearance from the cellar, to which he had accidentally consigned himself.

When the trap fell, and he was precipitated downward, the one thought that flashed into his mind was that he would be instantaneously killed.

But he alighted squarely on his feet—unhurt, save in experiencing a disagreeable jolt.

His fertile brain immediately prompted him to dissemble mortal injury—which he did, by groaning at a fearful rate, as we have seen.

In the same brilliant turn of mind, he resolved upon hiding in the candle-boxes, which were dimly discernible in the light that came from above.

One end was knocked out of each of these in a trice; he stood one against the wall, and drew the other over him, resting the two demolished ends together; and within this cramped compass—hardly more than sufficient to secrete the form of a child—he managed to pack his short, slim body away—twining his legs together, and winding his arms spirally around himself.

Then, through a crack, he saw the lamp descend by means of the string; saw three pair of eyes turned anxiously in search of him; and while he viewed the three dark, wondering faces, an inward chuckle caused his mouth to pucker as he thought:

"Three big Tom-cats fooled by a little rat!"

But, when the trap was raised up and secured, and he ventured, with aching limbs, from his concealment, he stood still, in the impenetrable murk, to ask himself:

"What next?"

He heard the trio leave the parlor; and in the deep silence that ensued, he pondered perplexedly over his dismal situation.

"Jack Willis, you're caught!" he exclaimed, half-aloud, while he smoothed his nose with thumb and finger. "I wonder what Evard Greville will think of my keeping him waiting so long? I wonder where that Delia Rivers is?—what those hyenas have done with her? And I wonder how I'm going to get out of this? Lord! what a hole. They'll leave me here to starve—no doubt of it. Starve? ugh! that's a horrible death! I'd rather be drowned!"

He groped cautiously around, feeling carefully every step.

"If there's a well here, I'll go down some more. And that'll be the end of John Willis, Esq.," he muttered, running his hands over the damp, cold walls.

Presently he felt bricks, and he stopped still.

"Now, what's this?" he asked himself. "Before I came into the infernal dwelling, I noticed that it must have a long cellar. Here it is not over twelve feet from wall to wall; and, unless I'm considerably knocked out of geographical calculation, this is the back. What do they have stone foundations on three sides, and brick on the other for, eh? Singular that. And here's only half the cellar of a thirty-feet deep house."

His foot caught something which slid, scraping over the earth floor.

Stooping, and picking the article up, he was elated on discovering it to be his revolver.

"Four barrels loaded yet, too!" he exclaimed. "Now, you old hag—and you hawk-faced villains—if you show the point of an eyebrow, I'll send the headache into you, by gosh!"

He pounded against the bricks with his weapon, evidently searching for some sign of a weak place; for, almost involuntarily, he determined that his only chance of escape lay in this direction.

It was with an indescribable thrill that he started on hearing a responsive knock upon the other side.

He struck the bricks again; and again came the answering sound.

"Hello!" he cried.

"Who's there?" was the questioning reply, faintly audible.

"Me! Jack Willis! Detective! Who are you?" he shouted and asked at once.

But, instead of an answer, Willis detected a scratching, digging, thumping noise at his feet, and he listened in part astonishment.

This strange proceeding continued for some time; then he leaped backward with a squeal—for he felt something wriggling about his limbs, which presently laid hold upon him.

"What the devil—" he began, as he hopped on one foot, and tugged to release the other; but a voice interrupted him—a voice that seemed within the same apartment.

"What are you doing there?"

"What are *you* doing there? Let go my leg!" and when he was freed, he said, while he felt down to the ground, expecting to grasp some one:

"I'm a prisoner. Pretty near killed by a flock of vultures. Who are you?"

"A prisoner, like yourself. We must help each other."

"The deuce! I've got into a private penitentiary. But *where* are you?" groping vainly to lay hands upon the speaker.

"I am on the other side of the wall. These bricks do not belong here. Whoever built them up was a fool at making prisons. They are out upon the ground—without depth. See—I have scraped through, and just now I had you by the foot. Escape is easy."

"O-h!" was the prolonged, half-whispered exclamation of the detective.

Then he added:

"That's all very fine. But, I say—have you got a battering ram or a pickax handy—else we can't get out."

"Yes, we can. See this"—wrenching at one of the lower bricks. "The mortar is not dry, and, with patience, we can make an opening."

"O-h!" he exclaimed again.

Willis moved one hand over the bottom of the wall, and, after a moment, grasped a projecting brick, which the other had partially kicked out toward him. In a few seconds this was removed, and the two went to work arduously.

"Careful, there!—you'll skin my knuckles!" cried Jack, as a heavy foot struck his fingers and made him jump with pain.

It was slow work; but it was certain, and the incentive was all-powerful.

Occasionally they paused in their labors, to ascertain whether their enemies had discovered what they were at. But all was still overhead.

When, at last, the detective crawled through and arose to his feet, he could hardly suppress a groan; for he was still enveloped in darkness, and he believed himself as badly off as ever.

He knew that his partner in difficulty was a woman. He had touched her dress as she assisted him through the hole they had made.

"Can you fight?" she asked guardedly.

"Fight! Madam, I'm a whole regiment of rifles when I go off!"

"Come, then. We have a wicked foe to deal with."

"Lead the way. We'll demolish the individual on short notice—"

"It is not a man," she interrupted.

"Eh? not a man?"

She drew him to the ladder-steps, then paused and whispered:

"Do you hear?"

"Yes. What's that, now?"

The huge dog owned by the Indian crone, and which had not got over its disappointment at the escape of the negress, now lay with its nose close to the cellar-door, breathing an occasional growl, and on the watch for the reappearance of the one who, his instinct told him, was an enemy to his mistress.

"A big bull-pup!" said Jack, cocking his revolver and bracing himself for an encounter. "Come on—if he gets a chance at me, hope I may die!"

Simultaneously they sprung up the steps.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MURDERER CHEATED.

"RAP! rap! rap! rap! rap!" came a repetition of the summons at the front door of Evard Greville's house; and quicker than the raps palpitated the heart of the desperate man, as he stood listening, waiting, defiant, in the stillness which succeeded the demand for admittance.

Then there was another sound.

Impatient at the delay, and seeming resolved upon an entrance, those on the outside began to force the door, throwing themselves against it, while the quick thud of a heavy timber made the barrier tremble.

He glanced at the form of the child. Not a motion was perceptible.

Then he altered his mind, for he left the lounge, evidently going to meet these unexpected, unwelcome intruders.

"Curse their interference!" he muttered, as he hurriedly descended the stairs; "who can it be?"

But he paused with a new thought.

"It will never do for the child to be discovered—a dead child. That would ruin all. And mayhap it was his last cry that brought them. Ay, hammer away, you fools!"—the last as the demonstrations of the impatient parties redoubled.

"Let them wear themselves out"—retracing his steps—"it will take them some time to get in; and when they do succeed, there will be no danger. I can easily hide the body."

He was right in judging it to be the boy's cry for help that had drawn the now angry men to his house; the loud shriek had reached them as they were hurrying past, and there was no mistaking its import. They instantly concluded that a foul deed of some kind was being done inside the large dwelling—and a brave man never hesitates to answer an appeal for help.

Evard Greville re-entered the library. But he uttered an exclamation of astonishment. Little Carl was gone.

At the same instant of this discovery, there was a crash in the hall below, followed by the tramp of numerous feet.

"This way!" ordered a gruff voice; "there's certainly somethin' onnatural a-goin' on, for I heerd some one yell 'murder,' I know—a woman, I think!"

Under an impulse, Greville rushed to the window and looked out.

By the light of the great conflagration to eastward, he saw that which well might draw a fierce oath to his lips.

At the far side of the garden, where a thickly-overgrown grape-rack reached above the vine-clad wall, the figure of a boy was climbing upward, looking back over his shoulder as he climbed, and grasping the frail support with trembling, nervous hands.

The little fellow was not unconscious, as Greville imagined him to be, when the latter went from the library; and the moment he was alone, he sprung to the window, thence to the overhanging bough of the tree before-mentioned, and made his way to the ground, with remarkable agility—stimulated to the daring feat by the intense peril of his situation.

Greville recognized him; but he did not think then of the tree and its facilities.

The distance to the ground was great; yet, he recked not the hazard. He only saw his intended victim escaping; and while his hitherto pale face reddened in a new excitement, he poised himself, for a second, on the sill—then took the dangerous leap.

As he shot out into the air, three men entered the library on a half-run, and just caught sight of his vanishing form.

"Told you so!" exclaimed one, as all three ran to the window and peered downward. "See!—there's a broken neck!"

A still shape lay on the sward below; but no sound or sight, save this, greeted their anxious eyes and ears.

They hastened out to the garden.

Greville was lying insensible—having miscalculated the balance of his spring, and fallen with a force that deprived him of consciousness.

He was borne into the parlor and laid upon a lounge, where cold water was used freely on his pallid brow.

With the first return of life, his wits were paramount—he remembered every thing; and

an apt story answered the eager inquiries of the three men.

"You were just in time," he said, simulating more weakness than he really felt. "I was attacked by two ruffians, who entered my house from a passing crowd. Their object was plunder."

"Told you so, didn't I?" exclaimed the owner of the gruff voice, nodding to his companions.

"I resisted," continued Greville, "and they dragged me to the library. But for your arrival, I would have been killed, I fear."

"Which way did they go?"

"I cannot say. Even while you were knocking at the door, they were strangling me—"

"The rascals!"

"And when you forced your way in, I managed to escape them. I jumped from the window—the rest you know. Did you meet no one as you came in?"

"No."

"Then they got off."

"Are you hurt much?"

"Not much; but my two ankles pain me a little."

He spoke the truth in this, for his ankles were sore and aching.

The men soon left him, readjusting the demolished front door in the best way they could, and firmly believing the lie imposed upon them. Once alone, the villain started up.

Despite his weakness, his paining ankles, the severe shock upon his nerves, he paced to and fro, fuming, muttering, scowling, clinching his fists, and gulping down enormous quantities of liquor from a decanter.

"Curses! Curses! Curses on my fate! Satan is leagued against me! If that boy lives, then the Evard Greville who now rolls in wealth, will eventually be exposed, be dragged to disgrace—by whom? Ay, who will it be? Jose Moreno—would he were dead!—would I had not left my work half-done, when I sought to rid myself of the man who knew my game!—he will find him again, and hold him, like a sword, over my head. That Spaniard is the very devil at cunning. But, stop—did I not shoot him in the tunnel? Mayhap the wound will prove his death—I pray for it! O-h!"—grinding his teeth in savage thought—"this is a nice state of affairs!—And where is Hermoine?—where is Zone?—who was it that rummaged in the dark? This night has been enough to drive me mad!" He stood in the middle of the room, rocking, swaying from foot to foot, with arms folded, hands patting nervously on the elbow, and the lower of an angered spirit traced in his dark-knit brows.

And while the defeated wretch was brooding over his strait, Carl was racing away through the streets—he knew not, cared not whither, so long as he escaped from the large house, where a demon, in the guise of a man, had striven to smother out his young life.

As the little fellow ran, great tears started from his eyes and trickled down his rosy cheeks like the wash of warm dew on a crimson flower; and, occasionally, a convulsive sob broke from his lips, for he felt that he was entirely alone, separated from the only one whose cares he could remember—Lu, the negress.

The fire, the bells, the shouts, the thunder of vehicles and piercing scream of whistles, all combined in a terrific scene and Babel of sounds—these, too, augmented the fright which wrung his timid heart; and, though his little limbs were tiring with exertion, he paused not for a moment.

Block after block he went over, fleeing wildly, blindly, wrought upon by a nameless dread, and crying in a low, piteous way.

But, suddenly, he stopped. On the opposite side of the street along which he was running, he saw a crooked form on a door-step, heard a growling voice in dialogue with a woman.

The form and voice were familiar to him. He had seen their owner at Lu's home more than once; and then, after a second of hard thought, he recollected a name he had heard frequently.

"Hurl! Hurl!" he cried, as he dashed across.

"Hurl!—here—save me!"

In another moment the dwarf-giant had seized him in his arms, glaring out into the street, as if expecting the appearance of a foe—stern and ready for an attack.

CHAPTER XXII.

INVEIGLING AN ENEMY.

It was when the Indian crone cried out the relationship existing between Zone and Trix that the loud summons of the Hunchback at the front door rung through the house, and startled the occupants of the upper rooms by its suddenness and force.

And it was in the same moment there came another sound from the yard, at the back, which told that the large dog was sorely beset by enemies.

There was no time now for explanation in answer to the surprised exclamation which died, unfinished, on Trix's lips; danger at front and back was the first feeling in the woman, as she released the boy and returned, hastily, to the next room.

"What now?" inquired Jose, in suppressed tones. "Who can that be? Do you have people calling for medicine at this hour?—it is high midnight."

"Satan himself!" growled Miguel, ceasing to stir the liquid, and listening with the others.

"He has come to taste this stuff, as I live!"

"And somebody is fighting with Pet! Did you hear the shot?" she uttered, breathlessly.

"Not a shot—it was a snap of the devil's jaws!" declared Miguel.

"But see who it is, or they will break the door down," said Jose; and he added, as she crossed the room and raised the window-sash, "be careful how you show yourself. There are men at riot to-night, and you may get hurt."

"Who's there?" she put, with shrill bluntness, peering over the sill at the solitary form.

"What passed we have seen."

When the Indian woman slammed down the sash, she faced the men with widened eyes and peculiar look.

"You would not guess who it is!" scarce above her breath.

"Who?"

"The Hunchback!"

"WHAT?"

"Hercules, the Hunchback! He is on the steps."

The announcement was so unexpected that Miguel dropped the ladle, and stared, half in amazement, half in terror.

Jose started up, to the edge of his bed.

"You jest, Lala?"

"I do not jest," impatiently. "The Hunchback is here! he wants admittance. And I shall let him in!"

"Eh? No! don't let him in!" sputtered Miguel. "We shall all be strangled! *Cospita!* what a fix! Captain, tell her to keep him out!"

"I shall let him in," repeated the woman, while an ominous gleam came into her eyes.

Jose understood her. Immediately he said:

"Yes—let him in," and his own eyes glittered devilishly.

"Are you strong enough to aid?"

"Yes."

"Captain!" Miguel stammered, fearfully, "we are dead men!"

"Silence, fool! Lala, go on."

She hurried from the room.

"Captain, your wound has made you mad!"

"Nerve yourself to aid, if there should be need of your arm." Jose arose, steadied himself, then walked firmly forward as he spoke.

Miguel stared the more; his lower jaw fell; he entirely forgot the hissing and spitting of the boiling, bubbling, steaming mass in the pan.

"Aid! Aid in what?"

"A fight, perhaps."

"Fight! Fight who?—Hercules—"

"Ay, Hercules. We shall capture him."

The idea of capturing the Hunchback seemed, to Miguel, preposterous. For several seconds he was at a loss for speech; then he blurted out:

"By the nose of Beelzebub! you don't mean it? The fellow will eat us up! He can whip a mountain, and is more savage than the wild tiger! Let me be out of this." He made a movement to dash off; but Jose gripped the bulky coward by his coat lapel, and hurled him back.

"Sheep!" sneered Jose.

"Not a sheep, but a lion in chains! Oh, captain! let us fly! I am not afraid—not I!—but the smell of that curst fluid has turned my stomach till I am helpless as a cat! You can match him—"

"Silence!" Jose interrupted, raising a hand warningly, as he heard the woman opening the door, then caught the harsh challenge with which she met this intruder.

Hercules grasped the boy tighter as he turned to meet the expected attack.

But there was no one to dare his ready front, and he asked:

"How now, child? Where have you been? What has happened you?"

Before Carl could answer, the Indian woman said:

"You have come to my house like a man who has lost his brains! What do you seek? Finish your business and begone."

She had hurriedly placed a hood over her head, as she moved along the hall to admit him, and this she kept pulled well forward over her face, to hide her identity; for, had Hercules once suspected with whom he was dealing, even his anxiety to find Lu could not have drawn him into that dwelling.

To her words, he replied, sharply:

"I am told that a negress entered this house. If it be true, and she is still here, I would see her."

"I shall tell you nothing."

"You defy my nature?"

"What you please. If there is aught here you have a right to find, then look for it—if you dare."

"If I dare?"

"Yes. You are a bully and a coward, for you try to frighten me. Now, if you want any thing, hunt it out—come."

For a second he regarded her keenly. But the shade of the hood was effectual; he could

scarce see any thing but a pair of eyes that sparkled defiantly.

"I don't like her!" whispered Carl, timidly.

"Hush, boy; there is no danger from her. We'll search the house. By my soul! I think this is a wicked den; and if Lu entered here, like enough she has been foully dealt with."

"Why don't you come on?" exclaimed the woman, sneeringly, as she retreated at a slow pace backward; then turned quickly when beneath the entry light, to prevent the rays falling on her face.

The dwarf was not one to be turned aside by such a reception. The interior of the house was before him; he had resolved to find Lu, who, he now felt convinced, was here; and, moreover, he was impelled by a sudden, involuntary curiosity to see that woman's face—an unexplainable something told him he had known her in past associations.

Closing the door, he advanced. After a glance into the two parlors, he continued on.

Carl was now silent. The little fellow felt safe in those strong arms.

As Hercules ascended the stairs, he paused abruptly about midway.

At the landing there was a turn; opposite this turn was a window; and he had seen a face pressed close against the panes, looking straight at him.

It was only visible for a second; vanished quicker than it had appeared.

Little Carl saw it, too, and he pointed toward it.

While Hercules stood still, the voice of the crone came from above:

"Come—come—come. You are a coward, after all! Ha! ha! ha!"

"Perdition catch that woman! She shall not intimidate me—and I will see her face, yet; for I believe I know her."

He started forward, and reached the hall in the second story. But here he paused a second time.

He heard a low, musical voice singing in a room to his left, an air that was weird and fascinating; but it stopped suddenly, and was followed by a strange, wild laugh that almost caused his blood to curdle.

At that juncture, too, the window behind him raised a little, and another voice squealed, with a penetrating sharpness:

"Look out, there, you!"—cut short by the bang of the sash as it fell.

"Woman, halt!" he cried. "What sort of place is this? Are you a witch?—keeper of a mad-house?"

But she disappeared into the front room on the left, saying:

"Come on—come on; you are a coward, after all! Ha! ha! ha!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LITTLE LIGHT ON OUR PLOT.

By good fortune the house into which Mortimer Gascon had been conveyed was occupied by two families—one of these a young physician, just embarking in his profession, and wisely living in an economical way, with wife and child.

The doctor was poring over the pages of a medical volume, when some one tapped at the door.

"Who's there?" carelessly.

"You're wanted down-stairs."

"Wanted, eh?" absently, and without rising.

"Yes. Come quick—there's a gentleman in a dying condition!"

"Gentleman in a dying condition!" closing the book with a clap; and opening the door in a hurry, he added: "Why didn't you say so! make haste, then."

The woman led the way down-stairs.

He was soon bending over the invalid, feeling the pulse, looking grave, asking questions.

"Been sick, hasn't he?"

"Quite so," replied Zone.

"Um! Nervous prostration—thin blood—too much excitement. Some wine, madam; quickly!" to one of the females who stood near, awed by his professional gravity, and the fierce bristle of a struggling goat.

When Gascon had drank of the wine, he felt stronger; and when the nervous young man had gotten at the patient's precise condition, very comfortable arrangements were soon perfected.

Gascon was removed to a room up-stairs, and he and Zone were left alone to await the return of the Hunchback.

"I fear you have undergone too great a trial to-night," Zone said, solicitously, as she drew a chair near to his bedside.

"I feel better now. These people are very kind."

"Would it not be better for you to try and get some sleep?"

"No. I can not sleep, though I know the doctor gave me something to produce it."

He was looking steadily at her. She had removed the cape from her head, now, and Mortimer Gascon was riveted in his gaze into the bright orbs that shone in the eyelets of the mask.

"You are a strange girl," he said, presently, in a slow, thoughtful way.

"Am I?"

"Why do you wear a mask? I know you must be beautiful."

"I have reasons."

"What are they?"

"That I can not tell you—"

"But I wish you would," he interrupted.

"Let me see your face."

hours, but dwelt not on her conversation with the invalid.

And, all along, his eyes bent fixedly on that screening mask.

"Come," he said, at length, "will you grant what I ask?"

She started.

"No. Impossible."

"Have I ever met you when the mask did not hide your features?"

"Tell me, at least, why you and Hercules have taken so great an interest in me?"

"It is not important."

"There must be some especial satisfaction in saving me from the abominable hatred of an ungrateful nephew."

"Mortimer Gascon"—looking up from a moment's gaze at the carpet—"I can tell you something to astound you. Will you swear to me that, if I divulge certain secrets, you will never



"COME, COME, COME!" SHE RECEDED, BECKONING ZONE TO FOLLOW.—Page 7.

"I cannot. Won't you go to sleep?"

"I could not sleep if I tried. Take off the mask, and let me see your face."

"Have I not already told you, it is best you should not?"

"Yet I am not satisfied."

There was a long pause. Zone appeared to be thinking deeply—and she was. Her mind was wandering back over the scenes of the past few

"No"—after a second.

A slight shade of disappointment fell on his face; for, besides a desire to know why she wore a mask, he had hoped that he knew her at some period previous—this hope natural, when finding that she was interested in his welfare.

Another pause ensued. But Zone was not long left to silent meditations, for Gascon questioned her again:

speaking, hint at, write or make known in any way that which I confide?"

"I swear it!" he assented, not a little surprised at her earnestness.

"Prepare then for a terrible shock. You have been terribly deceived—"

"Deceived?"

"The Evard Greville, living near Union Park, is not your nephew."

"What?"

"There has been a strange, strange plot progressing in this city, of late years, one fraught with crime—ay, murder."

His surprise deepened.

"It is not the true Evard Greville," she pursued. "His real name is Carl Grand. Stop—listen; nor is the Hermoine Greville, now living with him, his sister—she is a mere adventuress, and *her* name is Delia Rivers."

for the waif, until it was verging on womanhood, when there came a man to the house who saw, admired, loved the beautiful girl. This man was half white, half Indian; was working successfully in the routine of civilization, and was rapidly accumulating wealth. By presents, kindness and close attentions, he at last persuaded the Quadroon to marry him, and the two started new in life together, very happily. He called his wife 'Rose-Lip.'

gether, they resolved to wreak vengeance on the inoffensive man—for she was wicked at heart, like her husband.

"They did not go to work at once, but waited until the married couple were blessed with two children, a girl and boy, the first the oldest."

"One night the Quadroon was in the nursery, with her two children, when two stealthy forms entered the room, and stabbed her in the back."



"HA! H-A-A! FOUND! LET DELIA RIVERS LOOK TO HERSELF! MY HOUR OF TRIUMPH IS AT HAND.—Page 9.

"Girl—what's this—"

"Wait. I am resolved to tell you more—yes, I will tell you all."

"Go on"—quickly.

"It was years ago, a little cottage nestled among trees and roses, on the outskirts of this very city. In the cottage lived a negress, with her child. The child was a Quadroon—not her own, but adopted by her. She nursed and cared

"Residing near by to this cottage was a married man, of wicked temper and devilish by nature, by name Burt Grand. He had long had his eyes on the lovely Quadroon, for an evil purpose; and when he saw her become the wife of the Indian, he was enraged, for she was now protected against his wiles. He deceived his wife into believing that the Indian had done him some great wrong in the past, and, to-

She was not killed at once; cried loudly for help. The husband came running to the scene, but was met by a cruel blow, that knocked him senseless.

"The victim to this foul plot eventually died. But John Lisle, the Indian, had other enemies. There was a previous suitor for the hand of the Quadroon—a mulatto, dwarfed, and horribly deformed, who was known to many as Hercu-

les, the Hunchback. This hunchback hovered persistently around, ever after the hour of his rejection; and when Burt Grand and his wife stabbed the Quadroon, he was outside the window, on a balcony used to sun flowers. He saw the perpetration of the crime. He saw, also, that the wounds inflicted might not prove fatal; and Satan entered his heart, for he resolved to finish what had been half done. He sprang forward into the room, and, while John Lisle lay insensible in the doorway, stooped to draw out the knife, which remained protruding where the fiends had struck. While his hand was upon the hilt, and ere he could deal a blow, the mother of John Lisle, whose name was Lala, gave her presence to the tableau, and recognized him. Hercules fled.

"When John Lisle bent to catch the last words of his murdered wife, he learned who the murderers were. Lala declared that it was the Hunchback; but, the Quadroon—who had swooned at the time—had not seen Hercules; nor had John Lisle seen him. But he *did* see the man who struck him down—Burt Grand; and he swore to exact a terrible penalty of the two wretches. Lala, however, maintained that the doer of the deed was Hercules, and vowed to seek his life.

"John Lisle began action on his oath, within twenty-four hours after the death of his wife; but it was years before he accomplished anything. The guilty wretches vanished from the neighborhood of their crime, and so cunningly did they manage, that the shrewdest detectives were defeated. John Lisle, though, was hounding on their track—an avenger who could not be deceived by false trails and artful maneuvers.

"It was in New Orleans he overtook them, and almost immediately, Burt Grand paid penalty with death. A quick, mysterious death it was, for no one could discover what was the cause.

"Let me tell you, here, I am the daughter of John Lisle—Trix, whom you saw to-night, is his son. The boy does not know, however, that I am his sister, and I will explain presently how that happens.

"I was quite a large girl when my father struck out the life of Burt Grand. Burt Grand's wife soon followed; but he had to accomplish this second act of vengeance in a different way. He shot her through a window, from an elevated porch, while she sat reading. Her son, Carl Grand, was in the room at the time. When my father fired, he leaped to the ground, in haste to escape, for the household was aroused in an instant. In that leap he injured himself so badly as to die in a few days.

"When we left Chicago to pursue the man and woman, I was the only companion of my father. After his death, I was alone—in a strange city. I learned of everything that had transpired, and, young as I was, I saw that, if I would keep the law from sifting the matter, and ruining me, something must be done to throw suspicion in another direction.

"I had noticed that the son, Carl Grand, had an intimate friend, whose name was Evard Greville. The two young men resembled each other very closely. The wounded and dying woman was lingering her last day of life out, when I wrote a note, and signed the name of Evard Greville. The note read simply: '*I did it.*' Fate was with me in the hasty act. My hand was rather masculine; the chirography was like Greville's; and, more than all, Carl Grand had had a quarrel with his friend, on the night previous.

"The conclusion arrived at was, that the shot was meant for Carl Grand. This note was never made public, and the death of the victim of John Lisle was shrouded in mystery. Carl Grand was drawn to his mother's bedside, ere she breathed her last, and made to swear that he would exterminate the whole line of Grevilles; and, to add to the solemnity of the oath, a pistol-bullet wound was inflicted on the palm of his right hand, that the scar might serve as a constant reminder—"

"Go on! Go on!" exclaimed Mortimer Gascon, as he listened, in breathless amazement, to the strange recital of the masked girl.

Zone had paused, as if she were striving to remember a good way ahead, before proceeding further with her narrative.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE TRAP.

THE huge dog, Pet, as he lay with his muzzle pressed against the cellar-door, waiting for another chance at the woman who had escaped him, was suddenly hurled over on his back.

Jack Willis and the negress had dashed up with unexpected quickness, and were fairly in the yard, before their foe could regain his feet.

Then there issued an angry baying howl from the red, frothing throat, and, with jaws yearning and fang-teeth glistening, the ferocious brute launched itself upon them.

Bang! went the revolver; and the animal, doubly enraged by the sting of a dangerous wound, yelped with pain as it sprang through the air full onto the detective.

"Help, here!" shouted Willis, as he grasped

the gaunt form, midway, by the throat, and, with a superhuman dexterity, sent it rolling over on the ground.

The negress was not idle. In the cellar she had found a barrel-stave; and with this she met the second spring of the dog, as he renewed the attack, snapping, snarling, and bent on tearing them to pieces.

The revolver cracked again.

Thud! thud! thud! thud! fell the stave on the shaggy head.

Pet sunk to his knees, with glaring eyes—still doing battle with his enemies, and seeming to feel that his mistress would, ere many seconds more, come to his assistance.

But no aid came. His back was broken; the blood poured from those fatal bullet-wounds; he was fast sinking. Yet he fought on, dragging himself hither and thither, frenzied in the madness of defeat and expiring life—for his two antagonists belabored him mercilessly, until, with one final snap at the detective, the brave thing went down, glaring defiantly at them from the dim, glassy eyes.

It had not taken long to end the scene; and now they turned away from the stiffened form, to attend to other matters.

Jack Willis uttered an exclamation, as he glanced across the yard.

Along one side of the high board fence lay a ladder.

They were in luck.

This ladder they had, in a few seconds, placed against the roof-edge of the one-story building, and in a few more the detective was at the window overlooking the stairway—Lu following closely.

"Hist!" he exclaimed; "stoop down—they're coming up-stairs."

But Lu cast a cautious glance through the panes, and her heart gave a great thump as she saw Hercules, with the boy in his arms.

She was for entering at once, but Willis held her back.

"Hold on!" he said; "let's see what's up, first. Hear the old witch—she's calling him."

They stooped low beneath the sill as Hercules passed on; and when his shadow moved away, Willis ventured another scrutiny of the interior.

He saw the Hunchback pause, hesitating, on the second floor; and it was he who called out warningly to the man who was being led into a trap.

Hercules started forward again, as the voice of the Indian woman came from the room wherein she had disappeared.

Little Carl clung closer to him.

When the Hunchback reached the doorway he paused and looked ahead.

The room was bare of every thing. Between the panes of the only window, and its closed shutter, his quick eye caught sight of iron bars, and instantly he suspected foul play.

He would have retreated; already he was cognizant of danger, for he saw in that hasty glance that the woman had vanished by some means known only to herself.

But the crone and her accomplices worked well together.

An ax-like blow fell on the neck of the hesitating man, knocking him forward on his face.

The frightened cry of Carl, as he saw the silent figure glide swift and menacingly from the opposite room, was not in time to warn of the foe in the rear.

And Jose Moreno uttered an oath of savage glee as he pulled the massive door shut and turned the key in the lock.

At the same moment there was a faint, hollow, threatening voice, seeming to issue from the wall of the prison apartment, crying:

"You're caught! You're caught! Hercules—murderer!—you are in the power of Lala, the mother of John Lisle! Remember the Rose-Lip, and tremble for yourself! Ha! ha! ha! ha!"

CHAPTER XXV.

ZONE'S STORY TOLD.

MORTIMER GASCON, as he listened to the strange story Zone was telling, raised to his elbow, and grew impatient for her to proceed.

After a short pause, she resumed:

"When Carl Grand had buried his mother, he immediately went to work to carry out the fearful oath of the bullet-scar. With two hired assassins, he struck out the life of Evard Greville. Then, when the vile deed was done, and he had once dyed his heart in wickedness, a bold plan formed itself in his mind. He knew that he was an exact counterpart of the murdered man, and he resolved to personate him. It had been several years since Greville left his home, and, with this to further aid him, he started North, coming to Chicago, where he was received by the family as their son.

"But there is a parallel here. Nelson Greville and his wife had a daughter; named Hermoine. This daughter was taken to Europe, at an early age, to perfect her education. About this time she was returning to her home. It is a strange coincidence that Hermoine, also, had a counterpart: a class-mate of hers, named Delia Rivers, who resembled her so closely that it was only when they stood side by side you could

perceive a difference. This woman, Delia Rivers, was companion to Hermoine, on the homeward trip. She was a beautiful being; but with nothing besides her education to sustain her—and keen wits. They were in New Orleans! Delia Rivers, during the voyage across the ocean, had conceived a plan precisely like that which took Carl Grand northward, viz.: to represent herself as Hermoine Greville, and thus throw herself at once into the independent ease of wealth! To do this, Hermoine—her unsuspecting and loving friend—must be first removed. And she was.

"By an artful use of poison, the foully-betrayed Hermoine was put to sleep forever. Of course, there was great excitement in the city—here had been four mysterious deaths within a month. But I will not dwell on particulars too much. It was a fateful combination which threw me into company where I saw this woman. Though my complexion was dark, I possessed a tolerable knowledge of the Spanish language—being educated with great care by a professor whom my father employed to travel with us, during the first few years of our chase after Burt Grand—and it being rumored that I had considerable money, I was known as a Spanish heiress, and mingled freely in society.

"She was remaining in New Orleans until the excitement should lull—having given her own name to the authorities as that of the dead girl; and afterward telegraphing to Nelson Greville that she, *Hermoine*, would reach her home in a short time.

"While thus stopping, she was, unfortunately, seized with a burning love for a young man who, while he admired her beauty and accomplishments, never once thought of reciprocating her passion. It was known that I had lost my father, since coming to New Orleans, and was entirely alone; and this, coupled with personal attractions—for I was considered beautiful—drew upon me many, very many kind attentions. Prominent among those who devoted themselves to pleasing me was the young man on whom Delia Rivers—or the false Hermoine—had centered her affection. She grew enraged at both of us—hating him, and vowing some deep injury to me. I would not have believed that one so lovely would do what she did; but listen, and you shall learn what a fiend she was.

"I retired one night, with a queer feeling in my heart—a presentiment of pending danger. And I was not uselessly worried. I shall never forget with what thrills of horror I was aroused, just as a distant clock struck one, to find three masked figures standing beside me. But, even in my fright, I snatched a pistol from beneath my pillow—I always slept with the weapon there after my father's death—and fired, with a hurried, hopeless aim. The shot was not fatal, though it hit its mark. There was a shrill cry—a woman's voice; and I recognized Delia Rivers, my enemy. They disarmed me, dragged me from my bed to the middle of the room, then bound and gagged me. Delia Rivers saw that I had discovered her identity, and she removed the mask. It is impossible for me to describe the dark, dark look that was in her face—it was awful. Now I perceived that she was there for a terrible purpose. Before me was a small charcoal furnace, glowing red, and two long irons were heating in it. She pointed to these irons, spat upon me, called me vile names; and I was not long in fully comprehending the intense peril of my situation.

"How they ever got into my room so quietly I do not know. One of them was rummaging over the contents of my trunk, and he found a package tied with a black ribbon, sealed with a black seal. It was my father's will, with a record of his life—both of incalculable value to me. Delia Rivers seized it, and, to this day, I have been striving in vain to recover it.

"When the iron in the furnace was heated red, this fiend-woman took it from the glowing mass, and flourished it before my eyes. I saw what her diabolical intentions were. By every possible motion, by tears, by frightened looks, I implored her to desist from her horrible plan. But she was a fiend incarnate! While the two men held me tight—even partially stopping my nostrils, so that I could scarce groan—she advanced, and swept the hot iron across my face—"

"God!—can such a thing be possible?" cried Mortimer Gascon, who was being acutely worked upon by these revelations.

"If you doubt it, then look at me!"

As Zone spoke, she quickly tore away the mask that concealed her face; and, simultaneously, another cry broke from Gascon's lips.

Hers had indeed been lovely features, at one time, for, even now, while the scars of the burns alluded to branded her with frightful disfigurement, there were still traces of symmetrical beauty.

It was a painful sight—nearly all semblance of herself forever lost; nothing left but those dark, lustrous eyes, whose depth of glance and expression were enchaining.

He was for a moment dumbstruck.

"You see, Mortimer Gascon—it is *her* work!—the work of the lovely creature who fondled on your neck only a short time ago, while you believed her to be your niece, and innocent of

wrong. But, now you have seen. I told you it were better for you not to see."

"No, no; I am glad you did this. But, go on—go on. What else?"

"While engaged in her hellish work," continued Zone, readjusting the mask, "there was an interruption. I had swooned from pain and terror, and the portion I tell you now, I learned afterward. At first intimation of discovery, Delia Rivers escaped unseen. And, before she fled—roused to a pitch of frenzied excitement, by what she had been doing—she struck at my heart with a poniard. God preserved me from the deadly intent of that blow, though the scar is yet fresh on my bosom."

"The intruder on the scene was Hercules, the Hunchback. I will not stop to explain how he happened there, so opportunely; but, he was there, knew what was going on, and arrived just in time—for, I doubt not, she would have burned me to death ere she left me. Hercules came into the room by one door, as the two men escaped through another. He pursued them to the roof of the house. As he stepped out to do battle with them, they took advantage of his position, and knocked him from the roof. How he was saved from death, in that fall, is a miracle. But when the accomplices of Delia Rivers returned to the room where they had left me, I was gone."

"The negress, the mother of the Quadroon—whose name was Lu—was with Hercules. When he pursued the ruffians to the roof, she grasped me up in her arms and carried me off. It was a long, long time before I knew that I lived. When I did begin to realize my sad state, Hercules was lying near me, unable to move, so severe had been his injuries from the fall."

"It seems that, when my father and I started in pursuit of the murderers of the Quadroon, the funds left to support Lu soon dwindled down, till (not knowing where we were) she was obliged to go out as a servant. The same fate which created every entanglement of the history I am now telling you, led her to the house of the Greilles—"

"Yes, I remember well having seen her there," broke in Gascon.

"When Carl Grand came as Evard Greille, she did not recognize in him the boy she had seen years back, as the son of Burt Grand. Almost immediately upon his arrival, Nelson Greille died suddenly. Mrs. Greille soon followed—the third victim to the oath of the bullet-scar. Lu detected the murderer when he had poisoned the orphaned child Carl, and, using promptly all the antidotes she knew of, this life was saved. She fled to New Orleans, taking the child with her. But she sent the child to a place of safety, a long time before she herself departed from the house, which was after the coming of the second impostor."

"Delia Rivers hastened to Chicago, in the character of Hermoine Greille. Carl Grand had heard of her and of her expected arrival, and played his part, at and after their meeting, admirably. She, being so much like the true Hermoine, was received even by those who had pictured how the child, whom they had seen, would look as a woman. She had gleaned enough from her companion 'across,' to make her safe; she sustained her role to perfection, and none suspected. When she and Carl Grand met, it was a case of mutual love at first sight. Up to to-day, he hesitates between that love—though it is not so strong now as it was—and the pledge he gave his dying mother. Each knew that he or she was not the other's blood relative; therefore each one feels justified in his or her love. But neither dares to speak on the subject, knowing it would betray the deception—and each one is certain that the other is the true child."

"Need I say that, when I recovered, I registered a vow—one to be even with Delia Rivers, and prevent Carl Grand proceeding any further with his oath of the bullet-scar? Hercules, Lu and myself came to Chicago to carry out our plans. We all had hurts to mend, and vows to keep; for the same two men who assisted Delia Rivers in her outrage upon me, had attempted Lu's life shortly after she arrived in New Orleans, believing her to have money hid away."

"It was then that Hercules made known to me the part he had played at the death of the Quadroon. I believed his story, believed him innocent—do believe so still. He said, though he was so much older than I, he would be a brother to me. And he has kept his word. A brother could not be more kind than he has been, even if he is, at times, rather blunt spoken."

"On coming to Chicago, I assumed the role of a fortune-teller. Lu sought a home to herself, with the child Carl in her care, intending, at an early date, when we had arranged matters thoroughly, to expose the impostors. To carry out my vow of hate against Delia Rivers, I saw that I had but to destroy Carl Grand's love for her, and he would sacrifice her in his oath of vengeance. I laid my plans accordingly, and soon had the satisfaction of trapping my game. By mystifications and delusive speeches, I won his love. He would gladly wed me, tomorrow, if I were to consent, although he has never seen my face. Delia Rivers, therefore, will die!"

"Lu, the negress, in reply to questions I put to her, said she had seen a roll of MS., tied with a black ribbon, sealed with a black seal; had seen Delia Rivers place it carefully away in an old desk that was in the house; and I resolved that Carl Grand should be the means of giving me back my inheritance."

"But, I like to have forgotten: Trix, my brother, never saw me, from the time John Lisle started to hunt down his enemies, until I returned to Chicago. We had not long been here when he came to my house, seeking employment. I recognized him, but, for cogent reasons, did not let him know it. Hercules, also, knew who it was. He was a miserable, half-starved boy, and this prevailed upon me, besides the fact of his relationship, to take him in. I never treated him as a servant, and he must have noticed it. But, after what has transpired to-night—much that you have not seen—I believe that Trix was sent by his grandmother, Lala, to destroy Hercules—having impressed it upon his mind that the Hunchback was the true murderer of the Quadroon."

Zone paused at this point, as if her narrative was concluded.

"Is there no more?" inquired Gascon, with quick warmth.

"There may be much more; but I have told you all I can. Do you believe now that—no, stop; there is more that I can tell. Hercules was recently in the employ of Carl Grand—"

"Yes, I remember his being there when I arrived."

"The false Hermoine had asked Carl Grand what had caused the sudden decease of her father and mother. In reply he informed her that their uncle—you—had poisoned them—"

"God! what a wretch!"

"He further said that he had sworn, by the scar in the palm of his hand, to have your life. You were coming to his house soon, and he called upon her, in the name of the dead, to assist. She, fully his equal in wickedness, readily acquiesced; for she saw that this would increase their wealth. By skillful management on the part of Hercules, you have been saved to confront them—"

"And I will!" he interrupted, vehemently. "Once let me get strong again, and I will be only too eager to crush the vipers that have been stinging at my life, and usurping the heirloom of Greille. But tell me, how did Hercules get into the employ of this murderous scoundrel?"

Whatever reply Zone would have made it was stayed by the opening of the door, and one of the women of the house said:

"Here's a gentleman who says he must see you."

Zone uttered a cry. Mortimer Gascon gazed in astonishment.

The unexpected visitor was Evard Greille—the owner of the pale face that had appeared at the library window of the large house near Union Park.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A STRANGE CURE.

So sudden and systematic was the delivery of the blow which felled the Hunchback—well calculated, sped with all the force of hate, by an arm nerved to its greatest strength—that the victim was partially stunned, completely surprised, a close prisoner within the passage of a few seconds.

Little Carl slipped from his arms, and fell heavily. But the child made no sound; remaining quietly prostrate till he should be spoken to—for he knew that they were in trouble, readily perceived that the occupants of the house were their enemies—and he waited, listening, half fearing that the terrible stroke had killed his protector.

In the center of the ceiling of the room which was now the Hunchback's prison, was a small skylight, through which a dim, uncertain glimmer, caused by the conflagration, quivered and broke the thick murkiness of surrounding objects.

At one side was a fire-place. The top of this fire-place, inside, was firmly shut with an arch of brick; but, on that side next to the room in which the maniac was confined, there was an exit, cunningly contrived—and by this means, Lala had disappeared; crying out the significant words from between the walls, which struck like a knell into the ears of her enemy.

Lala emerged from the fire-place into Hermoine's presence.

The maniac was sitting upon the floor, with her head bowed, swaying gently as she worked and twisted her fingers through her long disheveled hair.

"She does not see me," thought the Indian woman, as she glided, swift and noiseless, across the apartment.

Jose was on the outside, prompt in carrying out the plan that was understood between them.

She glanced at Hermoine—then gave one quick, loud knock on the door.

"Lala!"

"Yes. Hurry."

In another moment she was out of the room, and Jose re-locked the door. But the maniac had seen her. No sooner was she gone than Hermoine started up; and while her strangely brilliant eyes lighted with a peculiar sparkle, an unreadable expression dwelt in her disfigured, blood-stained face, she glanced alternately toward the door and the fire-place; then advanced to the latter on tip-toe, examining it curiously.

"That queer woman again!" she said to herself. "Who can she be? So ugly, too! Here—she came out of here. I saw her. That's funny—the place hasn't any hole in it—no. I wonder how she did it?"

She continued thus, all the while looking and fingering about the interior of the chimney.

Miguel had joined his captain when Lala came out, having assured himself that the Hunchback was safely caged.

She frowned on the bulky Spaniard, as she caught Jose by the arm and half dragged him back to the medicine room.

"Fool! you have left my lotion to burn!" she exclaimed. "Back with you! and stir it quickly, or the captain will die."

"Cospita! he must not die!" cried Miguel, as he returned in haste to the pan.

And he was just in time. Another second of neglect, and the stuff would have been ruined.

"Smell this," he muttered, vigorously twirling the ladle round and round. "I am sick with it. Captain, this is a foul liquid of poison!"

"Mind your duty, there, and talk less," snapped the woman.

"Eurgh! Can I do more than I am at?" sharp and savage.

"He is safe—safe!" said Lala to Jose, as she made the latter lie down again on the bed.

The exertion had cost him dear, for he was now too weak to reply. She saw this; and when she had fixed him comfortably, she turned her attention to the steaming pan.

"It is done. You may leave off."

Miguel was glad to retire. He went to the bedside of his captain, and while he still regarded Lala covertly, he whispered:

"Are you sure that tiger is safe? If he should get out, he will claw us to pieces in a minute—"

"Cease your gabble!" commanded Lala, who overheard him. "He can not talk—do you not see it? Wait till I have done with him."

"You are an old snarl—dragon!" growled Miguel.

"Peace."

"Peace it is, then."

She prepared a large, thick plaster, or poultice, and soon had it applied to the wound. Next she held a small vial beneath the nose of her patient with one hand, while, with the other, she occasionally wet his lips with the contents of a second vial—presently bidding Miguel hold his hands tightly.

A perceptible effect was soon produced. The plaster acted on the wound; the inhalation and swelling threw him into a dozing, drowsy state; and Lala gravely watched the progress of the cure.

"Hist!" said Miguel, "his hands are hot as coals. As I live, he will burn up!"

"Silence! Hold tight."

"But, there are sparks here, too! The devil!—this man is a battery; for I am trembling; and ticklish quirks are going through me!"

Suddenly the patient's arms contracted, with a jerk, and it was so unexpected that Miguel nearly let go.

"Hold tight. Straighten them out—rub," ordered Lala.

He was mystified, and obeyed in silence.

The fever relaxed at a rapid rate; and the Indian woman soon nodded her head with satisfaction, as Jose seemed to fall into an easy, refreshing sleep.

She motioned him away; and they stood off, looking at the still form.

"Let him slumber—it works well. All is right."

"How long?" questioned the Spaniard, under his breath.

"Not many minutes."

"Are you sure of that?"

"How? Am I charlatan? Hold your tongue, or you will make trouble for yourself."

"I do not like the looks of this," persisted Miguel, dubiously.

"Of what? Whom?"

"The captain. See—he is white as death."

"He is not dead, though; nor will he die. Fear nothing."

"Look now; if he should die—by the tooth of Satan! I'll have your life—"

Cut short by a movement on the part of the woman, who made a quick step toward him, raising her claw-like hands, as if to scratch, and uttering a sound like the puss-growl and spit of a cat.

Being totally unprepared for such a demonstration, Miguel jumped backward to escape her—striking his head against the half-open door with a force that brought stars to his vision.

"Now, be still," she said, chuckling.

"I could strangle you!" he hissed, while he rubbed his head.

"Try it," she bantered.

But Miguel stood too much in awe of her to attempt it.

"See," continued Lala; "already he wakes." Jose's eyelids were slightly trembling. After a brief space he sighed heavily, then opened his eyes.

"You feel better?" asked the Indian woman, looking down at him.

"Yes. Is it all over?"

"There was nothing done. I only put you to sleep. Get up now."

Jose arose. To his surprise, he found that nearly all his former strength had returned.

Miguel, in an ecstasy of delight, embraced him.

"Remember," said Lala, "I told you I would cure you for twenty-four hours. Now you are a strong man; but be sure and return to me in time, else you may die at a breath."

Jose Moreno drew a knife from his breast, and felt of its keen edge.

"Miguel, you will await me here. I am off on business."

"Business, captain—and with a knife? But you should take me—"

"It cannot be so," interrupted Jose. "I must go alone. Will you obey me?"

"Anything you say, captain. But the Hunchback!" his eyes widening at the sudden thought.

"What if he should break out? We shall be devoured without a chance!"

"Pah!" exclaimed the crone.

"No danger," Jose assured him.

He left the room, left the house—moved rapidly along the street.

The course he pursued was in the direction of Union Park.

"If I can but find Carl Grand," he muttered, clenching his fists and scowling ominously, "I will square my account with him! He tried to kill me, eh?—tried to kill Jose Moreno, who served him well as a tool once. Better that he had drank of poison! He shall die!—die! I am resolved on it. So I've got the boy in hand again? I might let Carl Grand live, and yet be rich myself, if Lala can cure this 'curst wound—no, no, no; Carl Grand shall die!"

He soon reached the house. The broken doorway afforded him an easy entrance.

Gaining the house, he advanced with a cat-like stealth, and grasped the bright-bladed knife hard and firm by the hilt.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DUEL AND THE DEATH.

THE solitary occupant of the large house situated near Union Park, paced to and fro for a long time, brooding over the occurrences of the past few hours, and cursing his apparent ill-luck with voluble vehemence.

Time flew by.

Soon the pain in his ankles became so intense that he was obliged to throw himself upon the lounge.

As he sat there the moments multiplied. The night was advancing rapidly, yet he heeded it not.

But, deep as were his cloudy meditations, he started when the sound of a faint, cautious footstep fell upon his ear.

He listened. Some one was in the entry—they approached the parlor.

He looked quickly up; and what he saw was so unexpected and significant, that all his effort at self-control could not check the exclamation of surprise on his lips, the thrill of uneasiness in his heart.

"Jose Moreno! You here!"

The Spaniard stood in the doorway. A smile that was devilish parted his lips, showing his white, regular, glistening teeth; a look that was strange made his small, dark eyes glance with a fiery sparkle; and while he met the other's gaze, there rushed from his tongue's end, half-hissing, half-whispering:

"Yes, I am here. Can you guess what brings me?"

"I am no guesser—nor am I a fool! Begone! You have no business in this house!"

"A man's business sometimes forces him to unpleasant places and to unpleasant duties. And I am here on business—with you."

"Begone, I say!"

"Slowly—slowly, Carl Grand. Let me tell you something: Jose Moreno was once your affectionate dog—he used to do your bidding for the money and smiles of approval you paid him. He helped you to kill Nelson Greville—and after the last, you thought you would kill Jose Moreno, to be rid of him. Is it not so? When I first came here to-night I told you your day of reckoning might not be far off. Then you shot at me a few hours ago in the tunnel. I have a bullet of yours in my shoulder! *Madre!* but you are generous—you have sought twice to end my troubles in this world, by sending me to the next. How am I to thank you enough?"

"What means this tongue-wagging? Ha! there's a knife in your hand!"

"And it is for your heart!" cried Jose, darting upon him with a lightning spring.

Carl Grand (as we shall now call him) had grasped the butt of his ever-present revolver. But ere he could use it, Jose Moreno was on him, and knocked it from his hand beyond reach.

The knife circled through the air, and fairly whizzed in its descent.

By guarding promptly with his left arm, the deadly aim was turned; then his knuckles cracked as they shot out and hit the Spaniard between the eyes.

Jose staggered, but did not go down.

As Grand repelled the attack of his enemy, his eye caught sight of a shining object on the carpet, near his feet, which, notwithstanding all his recent moving to and fro, had remained unseen till now.

It was the knife that had been used by Hercules, in our first chapter, to cut the flesh from Hermoine's brow.

With a cry, he sprung forward and gained possession of the weapon before Jose recovered from the blow that had been dealt him.

They were now evenly matched; for we have said that Carl Grand was no coward, and his unyielding nature made him a stern antagonist for the man who faced him, mad for vengeance, and enraged at the defeat of his first trick.

"Now, then, Jose Moreno, we are armed alike!" the young man ground out between his teeth. "Come on! and we'll see who is the quickest on muscle. You know me well enough—know that I never turned my back to an enemy. Come on, then—come!"

The speaker's body was leaning forward, with right limb to the front, knee slightly bent, every muscle in his frame schooled to steel-like elasticity, and weapon ready.

He glared defiantly at his foe, and waited for him to close.

The Spaniard was calm—the only sign of the fire and hate which was consuming him visible in the snaky eyes, that were fixed, hard and glittering, on Carl Grand.

Not a word more passed while they eyed each other for several seconds; during which time Jose took off his short coat and wrapped it carefully round his left arm.

Then he planted himself in a position much like that assumed by Grand; but he was not stationary; by a motion of the feet, that scarce disturbed the body, he drew nearer, inch by inch.

Grand clutched the knife-hilt firmer.

Nearer came Jose. Suddenly, with a snap of his jaws and drawing a short breath, he launched himself, headlong, into the duel.

Carl Grand struck quick and fierce at the Spaniard's neck; but there was only a ringing clash of steel, a spark or two, and then the terrible struggle began.

In vain each tried to seize the other's knife-hand; and, meantime, many ugly wounds were exchanged.

Jose's coat served him well. It received a number of lightning thrusts, that would have proven fatal had they reached their marks.

Now forward, now backward went the two men, their bodies, arms and limbs bending, circling, twisting; and the knives clashed above their heads and about their sides and backs, in stroke or parry—anon reaching an accidental mark and wringing a curse or a groan from the lips of the unfortunate one.

Presently they tripped over a chair, and fell. Satan favored Jose Moreno, for, as they went down, Carl Grand was undermost, and Jose's knife, which was beneath him, pierced deep into his left side.

A shriek of agony rung through the house, as that sharp point entered the vitals of the worsted man; and the Spaniard tottered to his feet, and sunk onto the sofa, gasping for breath, and bleeding from a dozen cuts.

But through all the smear of blood upon his face, there was a hideous expression of triumph. Carl Grand, his hated enemy, was dead.

When he had somewhat recovered himself, he raised the red-stained corpse in his arms, and walked hastily from the room, in the direction of the cellar stairway.

He knew that there was an old well in the cellar—one that was long neglected and had been boarded over years ago.

He meant to consign the body to this hole.

When he had descended, he searched carefully about, feeling with his feet.

In a few moments he stood upon the planks.

Then a wild cry escaped him. The timber was rotten and weak, and ere he could retreat it gave way, and he was precipitated into the black pit in company with his ghastly burden.

Another cry, a yell of terror and dismay, and Jose Moreno had perished in the very hour of his triumph.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LAST HOUR.

HERCULES regained his feet, and muttered a dire imprecation as he glared in the direction of the door.

The blow he had received had injured him in no way, save in climaxing the intention of his enemies, to make him prisoner.

"Hurl! Hurl!" little Carl ventured to speak, when he saw that the Hunchback was not harmed.

"Are you hurt, boy? Rise up—there—no, you are sound."

"I'm not hurt, but I'm frightened," said the boy.

"No matter; while I am with you, you are safe enough—unless they starve us to death. They dare not come in here where I am."

"And where are we? What is this dark place?"

"We are trapped, child," adding half aloud: "May the infernal fires burn that hag! Why was I so blind? why did I not stop to reckon my danger? Did you see who struck me?" the last to Carl.

"Yes—it was the same wicked man who carried me off to-night, when they came to Lu's house, and had a fight—"

"They were Jose Moreno and the wretch Miguel!" broke in Hercules. Then he hung his head in thought. "Perdition! I am caught, indeed! Lala will have my life because I killed the Quadroon wife of her child; while I—I would sacrifice my eyes, if I could get rid of the bloody vision that has haunted me ever since I—but, there, there! I will not torture myself, for it is no use. Those Spaniards! They would kill me because they fear me. How will they do it? Some way. And this poor boy! Why should he die? Is there no escape?"

As he questioned himself, he glanced about; but there was no hope in what he saw.

The door was of stout timber—the lock arranged so that he could not get at it. The windows were barred heavily; the skylight was far beyond reach of his best leap, and the room was bare of everything that could assist him.

He began pacing the narrow limit of his prison, with quick, long strides; grinding his teeth together, cursing his enemies, and snarling like an angry animal in its cramped cage.

Carl retired to a corner, and sat down upon the floor. He watched this strange man, with his large, blue eyes opened wide, and silent in a sort of awe.

Pretty soon there was a rap on the panel, and a rough voice shouted:

"Ho, there, Hunchback! how is it now—eh?"

It was Miguel. After Jose's departure, he and the crone went to the door to tantalize their captive.

The Spaniard being well assured that there was no danger to be apprehended, grew very bold, and he rapped spitefully with his knuckles, as he called. Hercules was enraged.

"Begone from there, you dog!" he cried back.

"Dog, yourself!" retorted Miguel, "for you are mad as with hydrophobia, and only dogs have it! I fancy I see the froth at your lips! ho!—and the green in your eyes! Your long teeth are ready to bite the first you can! Hear! You are the dog! What do you think of yourself, crookback? Do you know me? It is I, Miguel, who cast you from the roof in New Orleans, and tried to break your bones! I laugh at you—"

"Begone, I say!" growled the prisoner, savagely. "You are a coward!"

The crone was grinning. She saw that her companion was torturing the Hunchback with his boastful language.

"Oho! a coward!" pursued Miguel.

"You shall see. I am coming in there to fight you. I shall bring a stick, and kill you!"

"Would that I could catch you once by the throat—"

"But, if I come I shall beat your brains out!—eh? what's that? Lala, did you hear?"

Both distinctly heard the shiver and crash of falling glass within the room.

"The skylight!" she whispered, anxiously.

"No—the javelin of the devil!" exclaimed Miguel. "He has thrown it in, that the Hunchback may have a weapon to defend himself! Next thing, he will take him in his arms, and bring him out here! Hark!—somebody is talking to him. Let us run!"

He would have fled at once, but Lala detained him.

"There is some one on the roof," she said.

"Let them stay there, then! I'm off out of this!"

"No; you must go up with me to see who it is."

"If? You are a fool! Wherefore should I burn myself with trouble, when—now, then! Cospita!—look!" He pointed to the ladder leading to the trap-door, which opened on the roof.

Lala wheeled quickly—then uttered a cry.

Miguel, with a snorting shout, rushed back into the medicine-room.

That which startled them was the figure of a woman. The woman was Lu. She was halfway down the ladder before they discovered her. Her glance was menacing, as she slowly continued to descend; and in one hand she carried the thick barrel-stave, still wet with the blood of Lala's dog.

They knew each other; and, although there was no previous cause for enmity between them, they now were faced, by force of circumstances, as deadly foes.

Jack Willis and the negress, from their position at the stair window, had seen all that passed.

When Jose Moreno delivered that telling blow which knocked Hercules forward into the room intended as his prison, Lu could no longer restrain herself.

Her dark visage was doubly dark in its fierce, scowling expression; and while she muttered something unintelligible to the detective, she laid hold upon the sash to raise it, and would have dashed in to the rescue.

But, again he kept her back.

"Now, just wait!" he expostulated. "Darn it all!—can't you see that, if we pitch in on such grounds, we'll get our heads chawed off? Why, there's a couple of big men—and, I'll bet, that old woman can fight like a tom-cat! Wait!"

"I don't fear them!" hissed Lu.

"That may be so—neither do I. But, what's the use of running risks? We may get that fellow out without having any fuss at all."

"How?" She looked closely at him.

"Easy enough. Unless these houses have been altered within a few years, I know that each one has got a skylight. I was here when they built this row."

"And you mean—"

"To pull him through the skylight, for its right over the room where they've got him locked in."

"Good!—if it is so?"

"So?—of course it is so!"

"How to get up, now?"

"With a ladder."

"Hal yes—the ladder."

She understood, and, without further talk, they turned to where the ladder was leaning.

It was a long time ere they accomplished the half of their object; and Jose Moreno had left the house, on his errand of hate and murder, before they succeeded in placing the ladder against the eaves of the higher roof.

Jack was first to ascend. When he reached the top he uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. There was the skylight. He stepped over to it at once.

Lu did not imitate him. She had discovered the trap leading to the interior of the house, and, in her fearless nature, she resolved to enter. Willis mashed a pane of glass, and called, guardedly:

"Hello, down there?"

"Well?" was the answering inquiry.

"I'm going to get you out."

"You are a friend?"

"Of course I am—"

"Go for help, then," interrupted the prisoner.

"No use in that; I'll get you up through here."

"I must go out through the door. I'll go no other way."

"That's nonsense—"

"Do as I say, if you are a friend. Make haste. Mortimer Gascon is at No. —, — street, and he will wonder at my long absence."

"The man's half lunatic!" thought Willis. "Mortimer Gascon—who's he? Oh, yes!—Brother-in-law to old Nelson Greville. I knew him well. Yes, I knew him."

He returned to the ladder, and rapidly made his way to the ground—entirely forgetting Lu for the moment, and not noticing that she had disappeared.

Running out at the alley, he collided with a figure that stood near the steps, like a dark statue.

"Out of the road, you jackass!" he grunted, recovering his breath, with a gasp; but he exclaimed immediately:

"Why, hello!—Greville!"

"That you, Jack Willis?"

"Yes—me—"

"Why did you fail to meet me at the saloon?"

"No time now to answer questions!" interrupted the detective. "We're in for a grand row! This house is full of tom-cats and reprobates! Jose Moreno, Miguel—"

"Jose Moreno, you say?"

"Yes."

"Then I was right. I was passing here, and saw the ruffian come out. I thought he looked like one of the men who tried to assassinate me in New Orleans."

"Yes, yes, yes; but there's no time to waste. You'll find Mortimer Gascon at No. —, — street. Maybe he needs you right away. My hands are full. Hurry yourself. I'm off!" He darted across the street to halt two men who were hurrying past, intending to enlist their services in the liberation of the Hunchback.

Evard Greville—the true Evard Greville—was not a little mystified by the detective's excitement. But he caught and understood the mention of Mortimer Gascon, and, fearing that his uncle was in danger, he started, at a swift pace, to find the house Jack Willis had named.

CHAPTER XXIX. THE CLIMAX.

THE negress and the Indian woman glared at each other with all the ferocious hatred of rival beasts disputing a prey.

"What do you want here?" demanded the crone.

"The man who is in that room."

"There's nobody in there. Be off!"

"You lie, you witch!—Hercules, the Hunchback, is a prisoner in there. Let him out."

"I shall not!" snapped she, perceiving that attempted falsehood was useless.

"But you will!"

"Try me, and see!" defied Lala, her eyes flashing, while she crouched to receive the leap she saw her enemy was about to make.

At that juncture, Miguel appeared at the door of the medicine room. In one hand he held the heavy iron ladle, and he held this toward her, while he cried:

"Here!—take this, Lala, and beat her in pieces! I can't stop, or I would help you devour her! Kill her before she can pray! I must be off." He dashed toward the stairway, intent upon escaping; for he plainly saw that Lala was hardly a match for the muscular negress—he had felt her prowess, and dared not to face her in combat; more, he saw that Hercules must soon be at liberty; and to be in the house, with the Hunchback free, was to be in the very jaws of death.

But the Spaniard was not to get off.

At one spring Lu left the ladder, and landed directly in his path.

Miguel's hand was upon his revolver in an instant, for he divined her purpose.

Ere he could use the weapon, the barrel-stave whizzed above his head, and descended with terrific force.

He tried to dodge—in vain; and uttering a tremulous groan, he sunk down insensible.

But the negress was soon busy. Lala rushed upon her, and, with artful precision, dealt her a blow with the massive ladle.

Lu staggered; and before she could return the blow, the Indian woman had grappled with her—biting, scratching, tearing—fighting with limb, tooth and nail, and striving to fasten her decayed snags in the throat of her antagonist.

With the fury of a mad wolf, the suppleness of a snake—now yelping, now hissing, now spitting and snapping like a monstrous cat, she sorely pressed Lu to her utmost resistance.

But we have already seen the nerve, the endurance, the unconquerable nature of the negress, in an unequal combat with two strong men; and when she recovered from the first shock, she, too, uttered a yell, and bent her muscles to the fierce struggle.

Dropping the stave, she doubled one fist, while she wound an arm round the crone's neck, and forced her chin up—then, like a hammer, fell the fist, and Lala shrieked with pain.

Tripping over the prostrate form of Miguel, they rolled down the stairs, continuing the fight on the landing—then went tumbling, doubling, screaming, gouging, down to the lower hall.

Lu shook herself loose, and bounded back up the stairway—just as Willis, with two men at his heels, entered by the front door.

"Hold that witch!" cried she to the detective.

But Lala had breathed her last. As they fell down the steps, her head had caught between the uprights of the banister, twisting her neck nearly in two, and she was dead ere the newcomers reached her.

As Lu made toward the door of the room where Hercules was confined, Miguel recovered.

He leaped to his feet, and struck her with his fist, from behind—a blow that brought her to her knees. But her hand was upon the key, and ere he could force her to loosen her grasp, she had wrenched it round in the lock.

He saw that all was lost—escape by the stairs was impossible, as he heard the tramp of those who were ascending.

Half-snoiting, half-crying, in terror, at his hopeless situation, he fled precipitately to the medicine-room, meaning to jump from the window.

But his cry turned to a wild, despairing shriek; for there was a roaring voice rung out behind him, and the form of the Hunchback shot through the air, squarely onto his shoulders.

The greatest coward will fight when death stares him in the face; and Miguel struggled desperately.

But as well attempt to stay by hand a heavy fly-wheel as to resist the Herculean embrace which closed around him.

He fired one barrel of his revolver fairly into the face of Hercules, but the bullet missed the mark for which it was intended—and hit another.

Hermoine had discovered the opening in the fire-place, and came through, just at the critical moment. The bullet whistled past the ear of the Hunchback, crossed the hall, entered the room opposite, and struck the maniac in the center of the forehead. Without a groan she fell dead.

Hercules was a demon in every lineament, as he felt his hated enemy squirming in his hold.

In less time than we take to tell it, he threw Miguel to the floor. Twining his fingers in the hair of the doomed man, he bumped his head with all the savage strength he could command.

The Spaniard's vision began to blur—he howled in agony. But the grip that was killing him slackened not.

Thud! thud! thud! struck the head. Blood poured from the ears, the nose, the mouth; there was a gasping, tremulous moan, and Miguel was past all aid.

Then a pistol cracked.

Hercules uttered a quick cry, and tottered to his feet.

In the doorway of the adjoining room stood the burnt and blistered figure of Trix, the In-

dian boy. He held the fatal weapon with its smoking muzzle half lowered, and his eyes seemed to burn as he cried:

"Murderer of Rose-Lip—die!"

The dwarf sprung at him. He did not budge. Again the pistol blazed forth its deadly contents; then those arms of iron, with muscles of steel and giant strength, grasped and raised the boy on high! One moment's poise, and he was hurled across the room, to the opposite wall, with a force that seemed to crunch the bones in his body.

It was the last act of a dying man. Both shots delivered by the boy had found a vital spot; and the Hunchback sunk down, with glassy eyes rolled up in their sockets.

Jack Willis and his assistants bounded in, in time to witness the last act of the tableau.

Lu came in, carrying little Carl in her arms; but ere she could realize how matters stood, Hercules was no more.

A strange, awful silence settled where had so recently reigned the sounds of deadly strife; and while the negress looked down on the last one who had perished, a single tear, great and hot, trickled down her cheek—and this, and the quivering lip, told how deeply she felt the loss of a companion whose friendship was dear to her.

The tragedy of our romance is over.

When Evard Greville entered the room where Zone and Mortimer Gascon were, he was recognized at once by them; and Zone exclaimed, half to herself:

"It is true, then! Edward Greville *did* escape the assassin's knife! It was his face I saw at the library window!"

Gascon held a hand out to the comer. In a moment the young man was embracing his uncle.

We will not impose a useless dialogue on the patience of the reader at this late hour in our story. Let it suffice to say that there were long explanations asked and made between uncle and nephew—mostly bearing on the substance of Zone's narrative.

It was near morning, when Jack Willis, remembering the number of the house, given him by Hercules, guided Lu to the locality.

The negress carried Carl in her arms; Willis carried his carpet-bag, which he had recovered from behind the parlor curtains of Lala's home. Zone saw a roll of MS. in the detective's hand, and it was tied with a black ribbon, sealed with a black seal. In another second that which was to restore her inheritance was in her possession.

"Where is Hercules?" inquired Mortimer Gascon.

For a while no one spoke. Then Lu answered, sadly:

"Dead."

"Dead!" The word was repeated in a whisper.

"Yes," said Jack; "he's gone up!—that is, he's defunct. So's that female piece of imposition who called herself 'Hermoine Greville.' You see, Mr. Mortimer Gascon, I used to live in Chicago; and I was here when this adventure came to personate Miss Hermoine. I knew she was a fraud; for the true child used to have a dark, hairy mole on her left arm below the elbow, when she was a child. I saw it! and this impostor didn't, because she wore short sleeves on several occasions, and I was unlucky enough to notice it! Mind, I say unlucky. For, before I could do any thing toward exposing her, she found out that I'd found her out, and she hired two rascals to drown me out on the lake. They came pretty near doing it, too! But I got off, and went to New Orleans—scared pretty near to death! I became a detective. While plying my profession there, I met your nephew. He told me what he'd been through, and what he wanted to do. I wanted some satisfaction myself in the same direction; and so we came to Chicago. I was on the track of a house-thief, named Miguel at the time; and to-night I saw him here. But our friend, the crookback, kindly saved me some trouble by thumping the fellow's brains out! And there's one of the remarkable sketches of my life. We're all here, aren't we? Now, I guess every thing will soon be all right."

"How did you come by this?" asked Zone, indicating the MS. "Delia Rivers had it."

"Found it on the stair-landing, at the house where we've just had a muss," was all the explanation he could give.

(The maniac lad, with a quick motion, deposited the valuable papers up in one corner of the stair-landing, when she was following Jose Moreno and the crone to the second story of the latter's house; and the roll had remained there unseen, until the keen glance of the detective had discovered it.)

If there is more to add, let the reader exercise his or her imagination.

We have finished our work—and woven another item into the events of that memorable night, when Chicago sunk in ruins under the scourge of fire.

THE END.

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